

VANITY FAIR

STAR WARS

The Rebellion Will Be Televised

INSIDE THE MASTER PLAN FOR A FLEET OF **NEW SHOWS**

STARRING **Rosario Dawson, Pedro Pascal, Ewan McGregor, *and* Diego Luna**

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STORY *by*
ANTHONY BREZNICAN

THE TV ISSUE!

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ANNE HATHAWAY
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SELENA GOMEZ
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Plus
THE CAST OF *SQUID GAME*

JUNE 2022



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—DAISY EDGAR-JONES

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PARIS

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HOYEON'S CLOTHING BY GIVENCHY; SHOES BY ROGER VIVIER; SOCKS BY OZONE; EARRINGS BY SOPHIE BUHAI. PARK HAE-SOO'S CLOTHING BY FENDI MEN'S; SHOES BY T.U.K.; SOCKS BY PANTHERELLA. LEE JUNG-JAE'S CLOTHING BY GUCCI; BOOTS BY SAINT LAURENT BY ANTHONY VACCARELLO; RING BY DAVID YURMAN. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.



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The *Star Wars* universe seemed plenty big back when we waited years between movies to catch up on what was happening in that galaxy

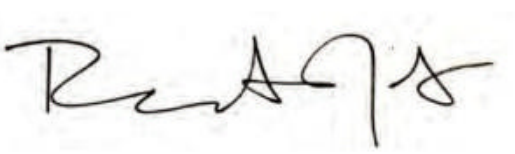
far, far away. But like our own universe, it's still expanding, 10 years after George Lucas sold Lucasfilm to the Walt Disney Company. For our annual TV Issue—an exploration of what's new and great in television—Anthony Breznican goes behind the scenes to report exclusively on five new *Star Wars* shows (plus the already beloved *Mandalorian*) planned for Disney+. As ever, the properties marry epic storytelling with cutting-edge technology and effects, and Anthony is the first journalist to visit the innovative soundstage that makes possible all the virtual alien landscapes we know and expect. He's also got details on the rematch between Obi-Wan Kenobi and Darth Vader (the return of the franchise favorites) and a charming story about how Rosario Dawson freaked out her friend's kid by FaceTiming him in full costume as a Force-seeker called Ahsoka Tano, complete with blue-and-white head tails. Even Baby Yoda gets the Annie Leibovitz treatment—his first-ever photo shoot, for the record.

If the expansion of the overall TV universe evokes the views of Einstein, then the nature of its evolution right now feels Darwinian: ever more varied, complex, and competitive. Sometimes the competition is right there in the show, as R.O. Kwon writes about *Squid Game,* the dystopian Korean drama on Netflix that united nations in its popularity. Joy Press, meanwhile, profiles Matthew Macfadyen, the affable star behind the scheming, smirking Tom Wambsgans, *Succession*'s ultimate striver. And for more on TV's survival of the fittest, don't miss Joy's column on how streamers, in their quest for dominance, are becoming more like network TV, for better and worse.

TWO YEARS AGO the photojournalist Alex Majoli traveled to Sicily for *Vanity Fair* to document the terrifying first wave of COVID-19. The entirety of Italy was in lockdown, an unprecedented and at the time almost incomprehensible situation—public spaces were deserted, hospitals overwhelmed, doctors exhausted and despondent. This spring Alex traveled to Ukraine to photograph a different deadly European front. Many of the images published in these pages are from the port city of Odesa, where Russia, now several months into its invasion of Ukraine's sovereign territory, has been operating a campaign of missile strikes. Alex captures the beauty of that city through the resilience of its people, and the pain of separation embodied in a father bidding his son goodbye at the train station. Similar scenes have played out thousands, if not millions, of times across Ukraine, an undercurrent of personal grief amid the epic tragedy of this war. ■



The cast of *Squid Game* graces the *Vanity Fair Awards Insider* issue.



RADHIKA JONES, *Editor in Chief*

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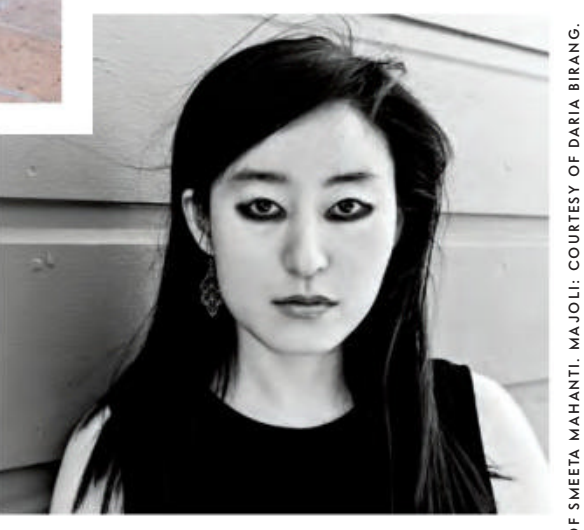




Clockwise from top left: the *Vanity Fair* team on set at the "Life of the Party" shoot, Anthony Breznican, R.O. Kwon, Awol Erizku, Alex Majoli.







BREZNICAN: CHRISTOPHER BEYER. ERIZKU: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST. GROUP: COURTESY OF CAITLIN BRODY. KWON: COURTESY OF SMEETA MAHANTI. MAJOLI: COURTESY OF DARIA BIRANG.

Alex MAJOLI

"THE GREAT RESISTANCE," P. 66

One moment lingers in Majoli's mind from his time documenting Ukrainian refugees fleeing to Romania during the Russian invasion this spring. "I was touched by a father saying goodbye to his son in the Odesa train station," the Magnum photographer says. "I was in tears taking that picture. The drama is everywhere; the pain is everywhere."

V.F. STAFF

"THE LIFE OF THE PARTY," P. 100

Clockwise from top left: *V.F.* entertainment director Caitlin Brody, assistant fashion editor Samantha Gasmer, senior visuals editor Cate Sturgess, market editor Kia D. Goosby, associate menswear director Miles Pope, fashion assistant Kaylyn Jade Study, and fashion director Nicole Chapoteau on location at the Beverly Estate in L.A. with photographer Nick Riley Bentham.

Awol ERIZKU

"FULL SUN," P. 27

The multidisciplinary artist, who photographed this month's gallery page featuring the work of Virgil Abloh, was a longtime friend of the late designer. "I kept referring back to our personal conversations from the past and even turned to some recent talks he's given as a way to find his voice on how he might want me to approach this assignment," Erizku says.

Anthony BREZNICAN

"THE REBELLION WILL BE TELEVISED," P. 34

"People love *Star Wars,* and the things you love should never stop surprising you," says Breznican. A longtime chronicler of that galaxy far, far away, the *V.F.* senior Hollywood correspondent aims to write for casual fans and obsessives alike, looking to shift "the perspective of what viewers already know—or think they know—about what they've seen so far."

R.O. KWON

"IT'S ALL IN THE GAME," P. 94

"Growing up in L.A., my Korean American friends and I would talk about our K.P., or Korean pride," says best-selling novelist Kwon, who was moved by the excitement of the cast of *Squid Game* about what might come next, not just for them, but for Korean media as a whole. "While I worked on this piece, and in this time of rising anti-Asian violence, it was steadily with me."

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VANITIES

VANITAS VANITATUM



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Everyone's favorite lit girl, **DAISY EDGAR-JONES**

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AT THE OFFICE WITH *PACHINKO*'S SOO HUGH

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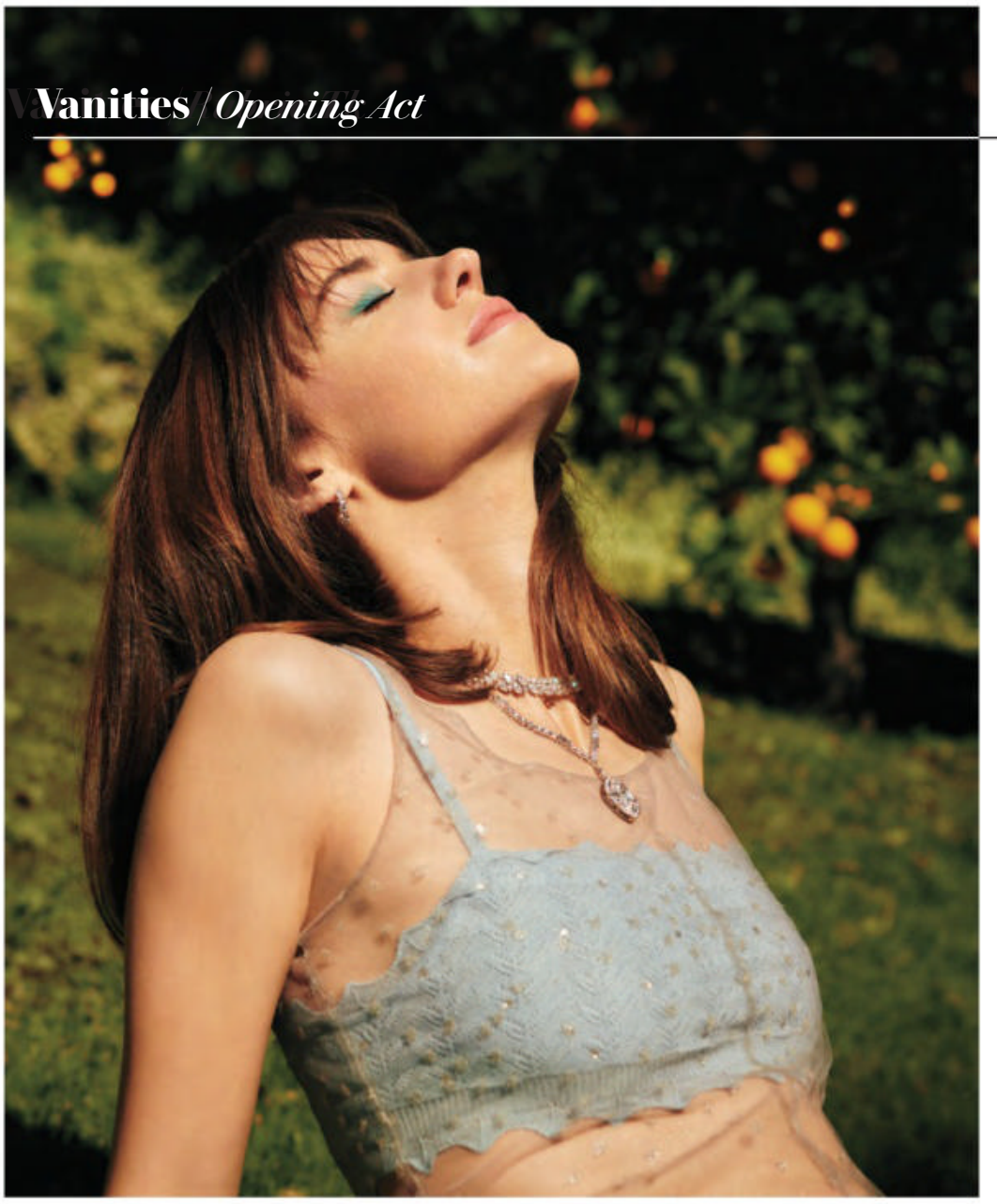
THE ART OF THE CLEANSE

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EMMA RADUCANU SERVES HER ROUTINE

Clothing by **Prada;** necklace by **Tiffany & Co.;** cuffs by **Tiffany & Co. Elsa Peretti.** Throughout: hair products by **Hair Rituel by Sisley-Paris;** makeup products by **Dior;** nail enamel by **Dior Vernis.** Styled by Michaela Dosamantes.

HAIR, RENATO CAMPORA; MAKEUP, SABRINA BEDRANI; MANICURE, ALEX JACHNO; TAILOR, SUSIE KOURINIAN; SET DESIGN, ANTHONY ASARO. PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY PREISS CREATIVE. LOCATION PROVIDED BY IMAGE LOCATIONS. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.



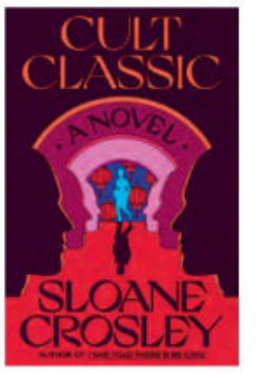
Jumpsuit by **Giorgio Armani;** bralette by **Alessandra Rich;** jewelry by **Tiffany & Co.**

Full BLOOM

Need someone to bring your blockbuster book to life? Just give DAISY EDGAR-JONES a call

When *Normal People* arrived on Hulu in 2020, the adaptation of Sally Rooney's novel made a star of Daisy Edgar-Jones. The actor and avid reader has continued bringing more beloved books to the screen, including *Under the Banner of Heaven* and *Where the Crawdads Sing.* In the meantime, there's Sundance darling *Fresh,* a comedy with a cannibalistic twist. Edgar-Jones reflects on her whirlwind rise and what chapters may lie ahead.

THE ONLY CHILD of a film editor mother and television executive father, Edgar-Jones fell for acting during a primary school play about Henry VIII. (She played Anne Boleyn.)
AFTER FOUR YEARS in small TV parts, she landed *Normal People.* Costar Paul Mescal "will always be one of my best, best friends. We were terrified, and we really held each other through that experience. Actually, we just went to Coachella together."
SHE'LL NEVER FORGET filming *Fresh*'s more gruesome scenes. "'You want to have a shot of my bare arse on the operating table?' That was the weirdest professional discussion I've ever had." Reading the zany script, she remembers thinking, This could go really wrong. "But, do you know what? This is my 20s. I want this to be a time for learning."
HONORING HER character in FX's *Under the Banner of Heaven,* a murder victim, was crucial. "Brenda's family is still alive, and we have an opportunity to share her life."
As pageant queen Brenda, the actor also performs "The Rose" onscreen. "Bette Midler, man. It's quite a tricky song."
AS A FAN of Delia Owens's book, Edgar-Jones braved lightning, floods, gators, and cockroaches filming *Crawdads* in New Orleans. "I kept thinking, This is the scene in the book where.... And then going, Oh, my God, but we only have 20 minutes to film it."
UP NEXT, she's looking for a summer project, adjusting to Hollywood—"It's surreal to be in a room with people you've been watching all your life, you feel like you stepped inside the telly!"—and hoping to get a call from Wes Anderson. —BRITT HENNEMUTH



Ex Machina

In Sloane Crosley's novel *Cult Classic,* a calculated plot coordinates run-ins with protagonist Lola's former lovers. Below, a few of Crosley's inspirations.



"OOO"
by Karen O
"When I think of Lola meandering the streets, I hear Karen O's 'Ooo.' The lyric 'Don't tell me that they're all the same' could be this novel's tagline."



RUSSIAN DOLL
(Netflix)
"I was almost done with *Cult Classic* when *Russian Doll* premiered, so it's retroactive inspiration, but I saw it as an affirming thirst for downtown magic."



THE REAL THING
by Tom Stoppard
"Stoppard's masterpiece has some great structural tricks. I often think of love as blurring 'the distinction between everyone who isn't one's lover.' "

RUSSIAN DOLL: NETFLIX. ALBUM: COURTESY OF CULT RECORDS. BOOKS: COURTESY OF THE PUBLISHERS. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.



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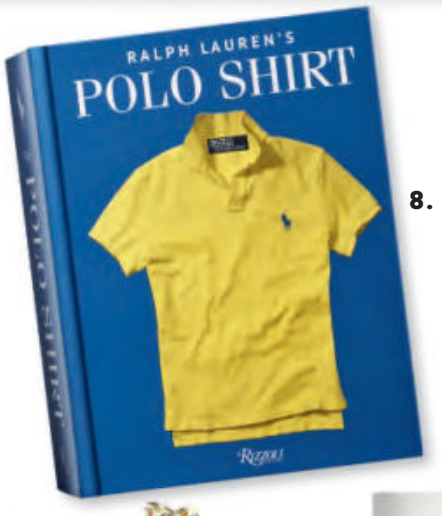
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Golden TOUCH

Add a little glamour to the month with new pieces, products and places to keep you entertained come rain or shine

■ ***Finer Things***

OLD SPORT: To celebrate its 222nd anniversary, Vacheron Constantin is reissuing its legendary 222 (**1**), which marked the Maison's foray into "sport-chic" watches. *vacheron-constantin.com*

JEWEL HERITAGE: Chaumet's Joséphine Aigrette Collection (**2**) is a beautiful new twist on the Maison's tradition of elegant pearl creations. *chaumet.com*

■ ***On Beauty***

ON THE SCENT: Acqua di Parma's new Zafferano fragrance (**5**) intrigues with pure natural saffron from Iran. *harrods.com*

GREEN LIGHT: Les Mains Hermès Nail Enamel in Vert Egyptien (**10**) is a nuanced emerald green inspired by reflections in the Nile Valley. *hermes.com*

■ ***Green Slate***

IT'S ONLY NATURAL: With certified organic ingredients packaged in the most sustainable materials, La-Eva (**4**) is the new natural skincare name to know. *la-eva.com*

■ ***Jet Set***

SPECIAL RETREAT: COMO Journeys (**3**) from COMO Hotels and Resorts bring together like-minded individuals on expert-led Active, Adventure, Creative or Culinary retreats. *comohotels.com*

■ ***Culture Trip***

LAY OF THE LAND: This summer, Tate Liverpool will present *Radical Landscapes* (**7**), a major exhibition showing a century of landscape art. *tate.org.uk*

■ ***Style File***

LIQUID GOLD: Made in small batches from hand-selected agaves, Casamigos tequila (**6**) is in a league of its own. *amazon.co.uk*

FROM THE TOP: To celebrate 50 years of Ralph Lauren's most iconic piece, Rizzoli is publishing *The Polo Shirt Book* (**8**). *amazon.com*

IN THE BAG: Louis Vuitton's perfectly formed Twist MM Bag (**9**) is a summer essential. *louisvuitton.com*





6. PACHINKO MACHINE

"I had no idea what pachinko was before I read Min Jin Lee's book. When the writers room started, our studio sent me this '60s model as a gift."



Star SEEKER

When showrunner SOO HUGH isn't ruling the writers room at *Pachinko*, Apple TV+'s hit series, she's working on the Thousand Miles Project, an incubator for those telling stories of the Asian and Pacific Islander diaspora. Here, a glimpse of her fancies *By Arimeta Diop*



1. HAND-PAINTED FAN

"It's important in Korean culture to give gifts as a way of honoring friends and family and people you care about. I got two fans as *Pachinko* was wrapping up. One was given to me by our Korean art director, Mrs. Cho."



2. ORNATE BOX

"I bought it on eBay; we think it's from the early 20th century. I hate when things are out. If I'm going to have paper clips, I'd rather put them in a pretty box."

3. BOOKSHELF

"Most of that top level is *Pachinko* research. I also always buy lots of copies of Patti Smith's *Just Kids*. It's the perfect gift."



4. OX-CHEEK SOUP

"That's from the show *The Terror*. I think we made 5,000 cans, and all of them had different labels."



5. KOREAN CERAMICS

"If I ever get some time, I would love to take pottery classes. It sounds so soothing."

7. SEXTANT

"You look at the sun, the stars, and the moon to calculate longitude and latitude. My last show was about men stuck on boats in the Arctic. I love the story of explorers, people who have this indomitable quest to go into the reaches that no one else wants to go to. I try to get myself into the shoes of the people who live those stories. And that's trying to teach myself how to do navigation on set."

PHOTOGRAPH BY OK McCAUSLAND

Full SUN

Virgil Abloh, who died in November at only 41, was renowned for infusing the menswear he designed with optimism and vibrance, whether at Louis Vuitton—*The Wizard of Oz* inspired his first collection—or at his own brand, Off-White. In this weekender bag from what would be his final collection, spring-summer 2022, a rainbow of tulips in fine leather blossoms from the house's signature canvas. The result is both playful and daring, the stuff of dreams that really do come true. —*Daisy Shaw-Ellis*

Photograph by **AWOL ERIZKU**



Louis Vuitton Men's Flower Keepall, £31,500. (uk.louisvuitton.com)

FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.

Coming CLEAN

As the wellness narrative toggles between self-improvement and self-acceptance, the cleanse gets a reboot *By Laura Regensdorf*

THIS SPRING, DURING a junk-drawer clean-out, an orange gift card appeared like a Ghost of Wellness Past. A relic from an erstwhile juice chain, it called up the early 2010s, when liquid fasts reigned in fashionable circles. *Detox* was a buzzword, even as nay-saying doctors noted the body's sufficient systems for such housekeeping. The methods, be it cayenne-dusted lemonade or hold-your-nose shakes, served as a secular rite: self-purification alongside a whittled frame. "Day two, you are the grumpiest bitch in the world," the actor Piper Perabo told *Allure* in 2013, "but by day three, you're so high, it's awesome."

It wasn't long before critics sniffed out hypocrisy within the health posturing. How could body positivity, then coming to the fore, coexist with hypocaloric (and paradoxically costly) programs that left people woozy with hunger? The practice, as Goop's former chief content officer Elise Loehnen said in a viral video this past March, "had become synonymous with dieting and restriction"—a cycle so dispiriting, she swore off cleanses upon leaving Gwyneth Paltrow's company in 2020. Loehnen then described dipping a toe back in, via Kroma's five-day "reset"—a do-over term for what the genre itself could use.

Developed by self-professed "wellness visionary" Lisa Odenweller and launched last summer, Kroma is centered on next-gen staples: adaptogen-spiked lattes, bone broths, superfood smoothies. Unlike fresh meal plans (Sakara, Provenance), this kit arrives as powders to be blended with water or nondairy milk. There's a Pantone serenity to the design; the packets are travel-friendly (I mixed the grain-free porridge at a coffee shop) and foolproof for multitaskers (tasty miso broth for lunch). Participants can also choose to layer in, say, greens and fish. "What we're doing with Kroma is bringing that functional-medicine bio-individuality into the conversation and saying, 'It's not one size fits all,'" medical director Will Cole, MD, tells me from his cactus-adorned telehealth clinic. Dubbing the easy-to-digest broths a "gut siesta" (he often sips a cup midday), he sees the "reset as a springboard, a leaning into nourishing things."

Still, diet culture clings. When Amy Schumer—an investor, with Paltrow and a cohort of tech and food bigwigs—posted a video praising Kroma, comments were divided. ("I was waiting for the punchline the entire time," one read.) To wellness advocate Jessamyn Stanley, who touches on religious fasts in her book *Yoke: My Yoga of Self-Acceptance,* it's all in the framing—away from negativity, toward an inquisitive kind of upkeep. "A recalibration seems like something that all of us should do from time to time. Stop the presses," she says. "Try again."

But can a five-day reset stick? "We have a habit memory system that doesn't change when we make a new resolution to live in a healthier way," says behavioral scientist Wendy Wood, author of *Good Habits, Bad Habits.* Workable strategies are key; a survey she conducted found that people who buy precut produce eat more of it—a practical alternative to "expensive powders." (Kroma's bulk-size jars get prominent placement in its post-reset guide.) Edwin K. McDonald IV, MD, associate director of adult nutrition at the University of Chicago, is focused on another barrier to entry: A trained chef, he teaches cooking classes in hospitals, sharing real-world skills while touting the microbiome-friendly benefits of a varied, plant-rich diet. A jump start can be helpful, he says. So can tapping into a powerful motivator: "Feeling good." ■





Kroma Reset A typical nine-course day, from matcha latte to magnesium wind-down. £74–£380.

KROMA: JOSEPHINE SCHIELE.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL GORDON

Net BENEFITS

Catch summer's coolest vibes with full-body fishnet, soft sandy hues, and pearlescent details fit for a mermaid



Screen *Splash* for summer fun: The family-approved and extremely '80s rom-com stars Daryl Hannah and Tom Hanks.

CAST AWAY

1. Khaite bralette and shorts, £700, £940. (khaite.com) **2. Salvatore Ferragamo** pants, £960. (ferragamo.com/shop/gb/en) **3. Orlebar Brown** shirt, £395. (orlebarbrown.com) **4. Omega** watch, £4,840. (omegawatches.com/en-gb) **5. Sophie Buhai** Fan Shell claw, £200. (net-a-porter.com/en-gb) **6. Ceremonia** Mascarilla de Babassu deep conditioning hair mask. (available in the U.S. at ceremonia.com) **7. Chanel** Le Vernis nail color in Sea Sea Green, £25. (chanel.com) **8. Prada** hat, £590. (prada.com/gb) **9. Luar** eyewear. (available in the U.S. at luar.world) **10. Chloé** dress, £9,110. (chloe.com/gb) **11. House of Bō** La Mar eau de parfum, £222. (Harrods stores) **12. De Vera** necklace, £7,555. (devera objects.com) **13. Hunza G** swimsuit, £160. (hunzag.com) **14. Loewe** espadrille, £350. (loewe.com/eur) **15. Cay Skin** Isle Glow face lotion SPF 45. (available in the U.S. at sephora.com)

SPLASH: BUENA VISTA PICTURES/EVERETT COLLECTION. SALVATORE FERRAGAMO, LUAR: JOSEPHINE SCHIELE. ALL OTHERS: COURTESY OF THE BRANDS. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.



Fiber OPTICS

A new monograph celebrates and contextualizes the work of a burgeoning contemporary artist

"I MAKE WORK for people to see, but the process is for me," says Gio Swaby, the Bahamian portrait artist who positions Black joy as an act of resistance. Last spring, not long after starting as an MFA student at the Ontario College of Art and Design University, she sold out her solo debut at Claire Oliver Gallery in Harlem: Her large-scale textiles unencumber Black femmes from the politicization of the Black female form. (Roxane Gay was among those collectors.) "The big moments have a lot of duality," Swaby says. Her recent success, which arrived during a time of mourning, was one such moment. Her mother, whose work as a seamstress proved influential, passed away the year before the show.



Gio Swaby, *Gyalavantin'* and *Pretty Pretty 8;* thread and fabric sewn on canvas, 2021.

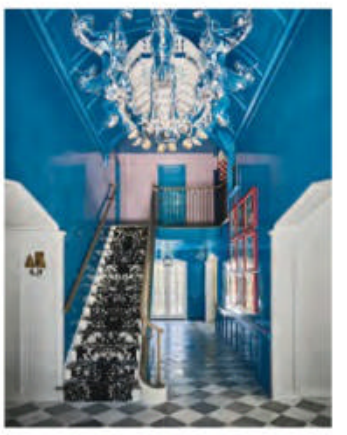
In *Gio Swaby: Fresh Up,* out from Rizzoli International Publications in conjunction with her first solo museum show at the Museum of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Florida, coauthors including Nikole Hannah-Jones frame Swaby's practice in the contexts of racial politics, Black portraiture, and textile traditions. Still, at its core, art remains "a visual practice for me," Swaby tells *V.F.* "I love to play with color. I love to play with pattern.... The heart is a really important aspect of my decision-making process too." She often returns to the words of bell hooks: "What we cannot imagine cannot come into being." —KAYLA HOLLIDAY

Space Jam

In *Ken Fulk: The Movie in My Mind,* new from Assouline, the interior designer puts his favorite projects on display.



Fulk calls works like this, at the Kips Bay Decorator Show House, Dallas—designed in 2021 and disassembled soon afterward—"this pop-up, Brigadoon-like thing." The designer rarely does show houses: The ephemerality, he says, is "beautiful and yet sad."



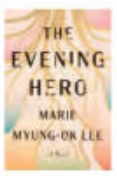
The new owners of this early-20th-century historic house wanted it to be "vibrant, fun, opinionated, and fearless," says Fulk. The two-story vaulted entryway, lacquered in blue, "looked like the Sistine Chapel, with all the scaffolding."



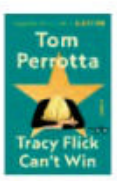
At Carbone in Miami, which opened last year, "I wanted it to feel like Maria Callas woke up on the Grand Canal with Frank Sinatra in a fabulous palazzo," says Fulk. —*Miles Pope*

GIO SWABY: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CLAIRE OLIVER GALLERY. FULK AND NOVELS: COURTESY OF THE PUBLISHERS.

SIX PACK High-octane love, time travel, and more new novels



THE EVENING HERO
Marie Myung-Ok Lee's sweeping portrait reveals the life of Dr. Yungman Kwak, newly employed at a health start-up, from his Korean childhood to his adult travails. **(Simon & Schuster)**



TRACY FLICK CAN'T WIN
Tom Perrotta's sequel to his 1998 satire, *Election,* finds titular Tracy vying for a high-school-principal position (and reframing her own adolescent experiences) amid the tensions of an impending school hall-of-fame ceremony. **(Scribner)**



THIS TIME TOMORROW
Like *13 Going on 30* in reverse, Emma Straub's time-warp novel finds 40-year-old Alice reliving her 16th birthday, her sick dad's health restored. **(Michael Joseph)**



AN OLIVE GROVE IN ENDS
In Bristol, a star-crossed love unfurls between Sayon and Shona, derailed and strengthened by drugs, family ties, violence, and religious animosities, in this debut from Moses McKenzie. **(Wildfire)**



EITHER/OR
In another follow-up to a beloved original, Elif Batuman brings *The Idiot*'s sex-curious protagonist, Selin, through year two at Harvard and a trip to Turkey. **(Jonathan Cape)**



YOU MADE A FOOL OF DEATH WITH YOUR BEAUTY
Mourning and desire collide in Akwaeke Emezi's story of Feyi, a rising artist who becomes entangled with a connected young man—and his father. **(Faber & Faber)** —*Keziah Weir*



PORTRAIT: SCOTT TRINDLE/AUGUST IMAGE. YOGURT: GETTY IMAGES. PRODUCTS: COURTESY OF THE BRANDS. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.

ACE *the Day*

After a wild card entry to Wimbledon last summer, **EMMA RADUCANU** clinched a U.S. Open singles title, sparking a career whirlwind and a Dior Beauty role. One calming strategy "is to center your breathing," the 19-year-old says—a tall order amid full-court sprints. Her daily routine is an anchor too, from breakfast to face wash. *By Laura Regensdorf*

■ ***Rise and Shine***

7:30 A.M. "My electric toothbrush was a bit of a hassle to travel with, so I went manual." Muji five-pack, £9.

8 A.M. "I go to bed thinking about breakfast. I love smoked salmon; Greek yogurt (1) is great. I try to set my day up with fruits, protein, and some carbs, especially because I'm working out."

8:30 A.M. "I take probiotics because gut health is big for me. I've definitely noticed a difference with my skin and general mood."

9:15 A.M. "Dior Addict Lip Glow gives me just a bit of life." (2) Dior lip balm in 001 Pink, £30.

■ ***Court Time***

11 A.M. "On my body I use a Supergoop! SPF spray—I don't want the grease on my hands because it's tough to hold the racket." (3) Supergoop! Play sunscreen SPF 50, £20.





12 P.M. "I find myself training in all white by accident, but I've stuck to that." (4) For similar Nike shorts: nike.com/gb.

■ ***Unwind***

6 P.M. "Because I'm an athlete, I obviously sweat a lot. La Mousse Off/On really refreshes my face." (5) Dior foaming cleanser, £36.

6:30 P.M. "Showering for me is quick. Aveda shampoo has always been in the family." Aveda Shampure, £17.

10:30 P.M. "I make sure to put my phone away. I feel like it keeps your brain wired and active."

11 P.M. "I'm on the hunt for the best pillow, but I like a silk pillowcase. It's really nice on my face." (6) Brooklinen pillowcase, £47.



RUSSIAN *Dolls*

The West's fairy-tale fetish is rooted in capitalist fantasy

By Rachel Dodes

YOU PERHAPS ALREADY know the story of supermodel Lena Perminova. In case not, here's a summary: When she was a teenager, Perminova was facing six years in a Siberian prison for selling ecstasy at Russian nightclubs until her dad asked Alexander Lebedev, a former KGB operative turned billionaire, for his help in her case. He helped. And by the time she was 18, Perminova and Lebedev, 27 years her senior, had fallen in love—"A Cinderella Story" was the *Harper's Bazaar* headline. Twenty years later, Perminova is a mother of four, philanthropist, and world-renowned fashion influencer with 2.4 million Instagram followers—an "Insta-hero," as *Tatler* magazine put it.

Other Russian models have followed a similar arc. Irina Shayk was heralded as "The Coal Miner's Daughter" in the pages of *VMan* magazine, "going from life as a simple farm girl in nowhere, Russia to a global celebrity." By nowhere they meant Emanjelinsk, a small village close to the Kazakhstan border, where Shayk planted potatoes in her garden until she was discovered one fateful day; she became the first Russian featured on the cover of the *Sports Illustrated* Swimsuit Issue and later had a baby with Bradley Cooper. Natalia Vodianova's incredible career trajectory—from selling fruit on the streets of Nizhny Novgorod to becoming the face of Calvin Klein and marrying a British aristocrat, whom she has since divorced—earned her the nickname "Super Nova." (Her star still burns bright; in 2020 she married Antoine Arnault, son of one of the richest men in Europe.) Sasha Pivovarova was an art student in Moscow who didn't aspire to be part of the fashion industry until her photographer boyfriend (now husband) sent her picture to IMG. She opened the Prada show two weeks later. "It's hard to imagine a more meteoric rise," gushed the website The Fashionography.

Is it really? Since the early 2000s, when Vladimir Putin came to power and transferred vast quantities of wealth into the hands of loyal Kremlin-linked oligarchs, beautiful women from Russia and former Soviet bloc countries have been branded with a strikingly similar narrative, a Cinderella story in which capitalism arrives as Prince Charming. Strange as it may seem to think that there are "trends" in human beings, there was a moment in the early aughts—around the time George W. Bush looked Putin in the eye to "get a sense of his soul"—when it felt like runways were a continuous parade of tall, thin, and steely-eyed Russians with names like Vlada, Natasha, and Irina,

ILLUSTRATION BY BIL DONOVAN

following in the footsteps of Natalia. At the same time, wealthy Russian shoppers began populating those front rows. By 2012, the *New York Times* Style section declared that "The Czarinas Are Back" in a piece about how Russians were becoming designers' most important couture clients in a generation.

We are primed to devour these rags-to-riches stories because they seem ripped right from the pages of Russian literature. Who among us hasn't been moved by the doomed passion of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, the ill-fated extravagance of Chekhov's Lyubov Andreyevna, or the tragic sensuality of Dostoevsky's Nastasya Filippovna? On TV, we were delighted by the seduction of beautiful KGB agent Elizabeth Jennings (Keri Russell) by the West on *The Americans*. In *The Great,* Hulu's comedic reinterpretation of the life of Catherine the Great, we scoffed at the debauchery of Imperial Russia while rooting for our heroine (Elle Fanning) to overthrow her boorish husband and unleash the Enlightenment across the land.

On and off the fashion runways, the luxury-clad women were, in most cases, unwitting props in a narrative that put a glamorous spin on Putin's global kleptocracy, allowing him to cultivate the image of a leader restoring Russia to its former glory, even as the money backing him was undermining democracies around the world.

The fetishization of Russian women extended beyond the fashion industry, of course. We need look no further than rhythmic gymnast Alina Kabaeva, hailed by *The Guardian* as one of the "new Russian divas" in 2007. Raised in Tashkent, in northern Uzbekistan, Kabaeva was reportedly deemed to be "too fat" for gymnastics until a notoriously tough coach put her on what she has described as a near-starvation diet and an intense training regimen, which earned her Olympic gold, the title of "Russia's most flexible woman," and, following her retirement, a parliamentary seat in the State Duma and a reported $10-million-a-year job atop a pro-Kremlin media company. By 2011, she was on the cover of Russian *Vogue* wearing a gold Balmain gown and

We need look no further than **ALINA KABAEVA,** Putin's rumored girlfriend.

fending off continuing rumors that she was Putin's girlfriend. Recently, she was reported to be holed up in a Swiss chalet with her four children, believed to be fathered by Putin. (Putin refuses to speak about his private life.)

When Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, Milan Fashion Week happened to be under way. As a result, runway models—both Russian and Ukrainian—were some of the earliest and most visible critics of the war. Ukrainian model Kristy Ponomar held a Prada bag as she gave Putin the middle finger in an Instagram post on the day of the invasion. Another Ukrainian model, Kateryna Zub, protested outside the Dolce & Gabbana show holding her country's flag. Vodianova posted links to charities and wrote on her Instagram that "my heart goes out to all mothers who are suffering the consequences of recent events in Ukraine," but was called out by commenters for not explicitly saying the word *war*. Shayk, in contrast, posted a peace sign and said "No to War" but closed the comments. Vlada Roslyakova, who identifies as a "Supermodel [and] Siberian princess in origin" on her Instagram account, posted a video of herself singing a Russian song. Permionova posted an all-black square on her grid with a broken-heart emoji, saying, in Russian, "WE WANT PEACE!!!!"

Some designers went out of their way making moving exhibitions in solidarity with the Ukrainians. During Paris Fashion Week, the fashion house Balenciaga left blue-and-yellow T-shirts on the seats of every showgoer along with a heartfelt note from designer Demna Gvasalia, who became a refugee when he fled Georgia as a child. In Milan, Giorgio Armani turned off the music and had models walk in silence as "a sign of respect to people in the unfolding tragedy." Ukrainian designer Dima Ievenko, of the brand Ienki Ienki, found himself stranded in Italy just a day after he showed his fall-winter 2022 collection. In an interview with *GQ,* as he scrambled to help his 120 Kyiv-based employees, he said he felt that the industry wasn't doing enough to acknowledge the enormity of the situation: "The largest country in Europe is under huge, violent attack from Russia, and still nobody knows and nobody cares."

He had a point. The symbolic gestures of support were all taking place as luxury goods were largely left off of the E.U.'s Russia sanctions. (They were added a couple of weeks later.) As NATO countries work to seize yachts and untangle the international holdings of Putin-enabling oligarchs, the glamorous mythology is being punctured before our eyes. And Western democracies are discovering that the call is coming from inside the house.

When Evgeny Lebedev, with whom Perminova jokes about being his stepmother (even though he's several years older than her), was elevated to Britain's House of Lords in 2020 by Boris Johnson, despite reports that intelligence officials raised concerns that he might be a security risk, Lebedev posted a photo of himself in a crimson velvet robe decorated with white fur on Instagram: "Muzhik amongst the noblemen," the caption said. Calling himself a muzhik—which is defined as a "Russian peasant"—was a bit of a stretch, but it was in keeping with the narrative that even the oligarchs like to attach to their personal biographies. (A recent profile in *Town & Country* featured the headline "The Dizzying Social Rise of Russian Scion Evgeny Lebedev.")

Asked whether he had intervened, Johnson denied it, arguing that the question "suits Putin's agenda to try to characterize this as a struggle between the West and Russia." His answer, perhaps unintentionally, revealed how entangled Western democracies are in Putin's dirty money, how we've masked a sinister reality by telling ourselves these ridiculous fairy tales for way too long. ■



▶

Darth Vader

In the new show *Obi-Wan Kenobi*, the lord of the dark side hunts his old mentor, setting up their fateful confrontation in 1977's *Star Wars*.

▶▶

Reva the Inquisitor

Moses Ingram costars as a fearsome exterminator of Jedi, wielding a double-bladed spinning lightsaber. *Obi-Wan Kenobi* premieres May 27.

THE REBELLION

WITH A FLEET OF NEW SHOWS ON THE HORIZON, DISNEY IS VASTLY EXPANDING THE *STAR WARS* UNIVERSE. *V.F.* DIVES DEEP INTO THE MULTIYEAR PLAN AND ASSEMBLES THE STARS WHO HOPE TO DO FOR STREAMING WHAT GEORGE LUCAS ONCE DID FOR MOVIES

By **ANTHONY BREZNICAN**

Exclusive photographs by **ANNIE LEIBOVITZ**



WILL BE TELEVISED



Obi-Wan Kenobi

In the eponymous new show, Ewan McGregor reprises his role as the young(er) version of Alec Guinness's wise old man, now in exile in the desert.

Mon Mothma

In *Andor*, Genevieve O'Reilly's galactic senator secretly leads an uprising against the Empire.



Cassian Andor

Diego Luna stars as a man who believes in nothing but eventually risks everything to aid the Rebellion. *Andor* premieres late summer 2022.



Din Djarin

Pedro Pascal's bounty hunter, a.k.a. the Mandalorian, has such an orthodox devotion to his culture that he only takes off his helmet in dire circumstances. Season three of *The Mandalorian* returns in late 2022 or early 2023.



Ahsoka Tano

Rosario Dawson's alien warrior is deeply attuned to the Force, but some fans call her a "gray" Jedi, because she doesn't commit to absolutes like her brethren. *Ahsoka* is scheduled to premiere in 2023.

Diego Luna couldn't trust the driver. He didn't think he could trust anybody. And hadn't he read something about an epidemic of eavesdroppers hacking phones? "That was just my paranoia," the actor says now. "Not connected to reality." Still, he pressed his phone so tightly to his ear that it made his face hot, as a voice from thousands of miles away told him secrets from another galaxy. The car was stuck in traffic on the top tier of a double-decker highway in Mexico City. "I was speaking in code words because I was trying not to say too much in the car," says Luna. The words he was avoiding most strenuously were *star* and *wars*.

Luna had played the dauntless Rebel spy Cassian Andor in the 2016 film *Rogue One.* Now, on the other end of the phone, was Tony Gilroy, who had punched up the movie's script for reshoots. Gilroy—whose credits include writing the first four *Bourne* thrillers and writing and directing *Michael Clayton*—was developing a series that would explore Andor's backstory, revealing what drew him into the galactic Rebellion and how he evolved from a self-serving nihilist into a selfless martyr. Luna's call with Gilroy—the first time he heard the full plan for the Andor story—happened more than three years ago. "One thing I remember, from being part of this since day one, is how little you can share of what happens," says the actor. "I have kids, man. It's painful for them—and for me."

George Lucas himself had attempted, and abandoned, a live-action *Star Wars* series called *Underworld* before he sold Lucasfilm to the Walt Disney Company in 2012. Scripts were written and test footage shot, but the level of quality he was looking for proved to be too expensive for a TV budget. Then, in 2017, Lucasfilm was tasked with trying again, this time making not one series but a whole fleet to bolster its parent company's streaming ambitions. Disney+ would need the firepower of many *Star Wars* shows to compete against rival titans like Netflix and Amazon. *The Mandalorian,* we know now, became a global phenomenon, which only raised expectations. This winter, *The Book of Boba Fett* delivered a redemption story nearly four decades after the title character's apparent demise in *Return of the Jedi.* Now, with 130 million subscribers waiting, Disney has upped its demands to three separate *Star Wars* shows within a year. For this story, Lucasfilm has lifted the secrecy surrounding its TV universe and how it formed, as universes do, under immense pressure.

First up is Ewan McGregor's return to his role as a weary Jedi master in exile. *Obi-Wan Kenobi* debuts May 27, tracking the character 10 years into his time on the desert world of Tatooine, where he serves as a distant guardian to young Luke Skywalker and is hunted by a dark side "Inquisitor" named Reva (played by *The Queen's Gambit*'s Moses Ingram). Luna's spy saga, *Andor,* hits screens late this summer. Season three of *The Mandalorian,* reuniting Pedro Pascal's helmeted gunfighter with his little green ward (you know who), drops in late 2022 or early 2023. Next year, Rosario Dawson will lead the series *Ahsoka,* playing the live-action version of a fan-favorite Force wielder from animation who was once an apprentice to Anakin Skywalker. Slightly further off is *The Acolyte,* with a tale set about a century before the era of the Skywalkers.

It's a bountiful time to be a *Star Wars* obsessive, to say the least. McGregor—who wrestled with joining the galaxy in the late '90s and wrestled again with whether to return—says the gig has saturated his life. "My partner, Mary, is doing that *Star Wars* series with Rosario and she's about to start," he says. Lucasfilm hadn't previously confirmed rumors that Mary Elizabeth Winstead will be in *Ahsoka,* but...now they don't have to. "Our little boy has been born into this massive *Star Wars* family," says McGregor, whose son with Winstead was born last summer. "He will either embrace it or really go the other way. I don't know. Maybe he'll be a Trekkie!"

ON THAT DAY in mid-2019, when Luna was recruited for *Andor,* the actor remembers looking out the car window at the rooftops of the adjacent buildings, visualizing the tale about resistance-minded spies and near-death escapes. He was especially glad that Gilroy's proposal included details that resonated personally. Luna describes *Andor* as a refugee story, with desperate people fleeing the Empire at the full force of its power. "It's the journey of a migrant," he says. "That feeling of *having* to move is behind this story, very profoundly and very strong. That shapes you as a person. It defines you in many ways, and what you are willing to do."

Gilroy breathes deep and reveals a little more about Andor. "This guy gave his life for the galaxy, right? I mean, he consciously, soberly, without vanity or recognition, sacrificed himself. Who does that?" he asks. "That's what this first season is about. It's about him being really revolution-averse, and cynical, and lost, and kind of a mess." The story begins with the destruction of

COSTUME DESIGNERS: SUTTIRAT LARLARB, SHAWNA TRPCIC, MICHAEL WILKINSON. MAKEUP AND HAIR: COOL BENSON, ASHLEIGH CHILDE ALEXEI DMITRIEW, AMBER HAMILTON, CRYSTAL JONES, MORGAN MARINOFF, DAVY NEWKIRK, JULIO PARODI, ANA GABRIELA QUIÑONEZ, MARIA SANDOVAL, CRISTINA WALTZ. FOR *V.F.*: SET DESIGN, MARY HOWARD. CREATIVE PRODUCER, KATHRYN MACLEOD.

Andor's birth world, then follows him into adulthood, when he realizes he can't run forever. "His adopted home will become the base of our whole first season, and we watch that place become radicalized," Gilroy says. "Then we see another planet that's completely taken apart in a colonial kind of way. The Empire is expanding rapidly. They're wiping out anybody who's in their way." By journey's end, Andor's path will be to block theirs.

The show also focuses on the enigmatic Rebel leader Mon Mothma, played by Genevieve O'Reilly, who portrayed her as a young senator in *Revenge of the Sith,* then reprised the role in *Rogue One.* Mothma (then played by Caroline Blakiston) was the priestess-like figure in 1983's *Return of the Jedi* who outlines weaknesses in the new Death Star, gravely intoning, "Many Bothans died to bring us this information." In *Andor,* her story will run parallel to the title character, whom we know will eventually become one of her key agents. "It is a huge, orchestral, Dickensian ensemble cast," says Gilroy.

Luna remembers the conversation in the car as the moment he was all in. "At the end, [Gilroy] said to me, 'You want to take this risk with me, man? It's you and I from beginning to end,'" says the actor. "It was like you'd been recruited to join a Rebel force. I was like, 'Yes! Of course, man! Yes!'" Then reality set in: "*What* did I just say? This will be happening in London? My life is in Mexico. Holy shit, what have I done?"

It's the theme that binds all the new shows: devotion. "What's unique about *Star Wars* is that we're one story, basically," says Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy. "George was always dealing with episodes. Ironically, he was serializing his storytelling. He was influenced by Flash Gordon and cliff-hangers on Saturdays at movie theaters. All of that informed what the DNA of *Star Wars* is, which is why I think it's just organic that we made the transition into television."

The transition was not an obvious pivot for an empire built on movies. When she took over Lucasfilm in 2012, Kennedy's primary goal was to rejuvenate *Star Wars* with a new era of films, after a trilogy of prequels that underwhelmed many fans. Few producers were better poised to do that, given her legacy of crowd-pleasers ranging from *E.T.* to *Back to the Future* and *The Sixth Sense.* By the end of 2015, Han, Leia, and Luke were back on the big screen in J.J. Abrams's *The Force Awakens,* which introduced the desert scavenger Rey, the redemption-seeking storm trooper Finn, the X-wing hotshot Poe Dameron, and the brooding Sith wannabe Kylo Ren. Rian Johnson's sequel, 2017's *The Last Jedi,* continued the Skywalker saga, as it came to be known, but veered sharply from Abrams's vision and seemed to close off some central story lines. Abrams U-turned back when he returned for 2019's final chapter, *The Rise of Skywalker,* taking over Episode IX late in development. The movies all earned billions, but the zigzagging narrative was conspicuous.

All this led to "the hiatus," a fallow spot in the *Star Wars* film landscape that Kennedy announced in early 2019, months before *The Rise of Skywalker* even debuted. Lucasfilm needed to regroup and rethink: "We all recognized, every single one of us, that this was a new chapter for the company and that we needed to all work together to create the architecture for where we were going."

Factor in the stand-alone movies *Rogue One* and *Solo,* and the Bay Area production company had been churning out a blockbuster a year, a breakneck pace considering that Lucas himself only released one *Star Wars* film every three years—with well over a decade between trilogies. Kennedy wanted to dispense with the annual deadline and reconsider everything. The most important lesson they'd learned was this: *Star Wars* required a greater degree of professional devotion from filmmakers. "Anyone who comes into the *Star Wars* universe needs to know that it's a three-, four-, five-year commitment," she says. "That's what it takes. You can't step in for a year and shoot something and then walk away.... It requires that kind of nurturing."

Getting something appropriately cosmic prepped for their streaming service's launch became Disney's highest priority. It had to feel as big as the films. So, Kennedy turned to a filmmaker.

JON FAVREAU HAD inaugurated the Marvel Cinematic Universe with *Iron Man* a decade before and was steeped in large-scale serialized storytelling. The actor and director had also become so proficient with visual effects that his most recent Disney projects, *The Jungle Book* and *The Lion King,* were often mistakenly described as live-action even though both are almost entirely digitally simulated. "I knew that Jon Favreau was always deeply interested in *Star Wars.* He was the first person I went to," Kennedy says. "He said, 'Not only would I have an interest, I have an *idea.*'" Plus, he was willing to meet that new criteria of hers. "What's unique about Jon is his commitment," Kennedy says. "He's had a sole focus pretty much on this for the last several years. That's been a godsend."

After meeting at Kennedy's office in Santa Monica, Favreau started work without even a contract. "I just started writing," he says. "So by the time I was officially hired, I had already written the first, I think, four episodes."

But there was a problem. Favreau's idea was about a Mandalorian, the helmeted tribe of galactic warriors who frequently turn up as mercenaries or bounty hunters. The first, and for a long time the only, Mandalorian in the early *Star Wars* films was Boba Fett, and Lucasfilm planned to make him the central character in a feature film being developed by director James Mangold.

Ewan McGregor and his partner, Mary Elizabeth Winstead, will both be on new Lucasfilm shows: "Our little boy has been **BORN INTO THIS MASSIVE *STAR WARS* FAMILY.** He will either embrace it or really go the other way. Maybe he'll be a Trekkie!"



That wasn't the problem, although Favreau would eventually pick up the Boba Fett story after Mangold moved on to another Lucasfilm property, directing *Indiana Jones 5*. The problem Kennedy faced was that another esteemed creative executive, Dave Filoni, had also devised a series focused on Mandalorians. Filoni is the colorful cowboy hat–wearing mastermind behind many of Lucasfilm's animated shows. He joined the company in 2005 as an apprentice to Lucas himself and developed *The Clone Wars* with him. Filoni wanted to explore some of the ideas they'd never fully realized. "I remember when I did *Clone Wars,* George came in and said, 'Well, the Mandalorians are pacifists in this time period.' I'm like, 'Oh, well, that's very different than what everybody thinks they were.' And he was like, 'Well, you've got to remember that people are never just one thing. Cultures evolve and they change over time.'"

Being able to channel the creator makes Filoni indispensable at Lucasfilm. He was a critical part of the company's new TV ventures, and Kennedy had been nurturing his filmmaking ambitions ever since her arrival. Favreau and Filoni were friendly, but Kennedy feared a turf war might erupt. She devised a fix. "I arranged a playdate," she says.

After meeting in Los Angeles, Favreau and Filoni exchanged ideas and drawings for a Mandalorian show that could combine their ideas. "They got along instantly, like gangbusters," Kennedy says. Filoni's knowledge of Mandalorian history blended with Favreau's lone-gunslinger concept. Most importantly, the



CAPE FEAR
Hayden Christensen, who reprises his role as Anakin Skywalker (now Darth Vader), trains for a lightsaber duel with McGregor's stunt double, Ross Kohnstam.

new partners challenged each other. Favreau's idea for the Child was the biggest sticking point. "It gave us some pause," Kennedy says. "He and Dave debated that quite ferociously."

The Child, of course, is the pistachio-hued scene-stealer who would melt the Mandalorian's icy bounty-hunter heart by becoming the innocent he must protect at all costs. The little one remained under wraps until the debut of the first episode, then instantly became an object of global adoration. His real name is Grogu, but in our world he is forever Baby Yoda. "Honestly, it's something I never would've done because *Yoda* is Yoda," Filoni says. Yoda's home world and backstory were never fully revealed, and Filoni wanted to protect the mystery that Lucas built around the original Jedi master. "I think people now look back and think it was like a slam dunk, but we were very cautious," Filoni says of the Child. "The amount of measuring, especially in the first season, for how we were framing this kid took a lot of effort."

The pair spoke with *Vanity Fair* in a joint Zoom interview, and as Filoni described his initial reservations in one window, Favreau disappeared from another, rustling through papers and returning with sketches and drawings of Mando and Child. One of them, drawn by Filoni himself, showed the baby's hand reaching out of a floating bassinet toward his burly protector. Most of the other concepts were off-putting—wrinkled, feral, or cartoonish. It's easy to understand Filoni's hesitation. "There were a lot of different looks that popped up, and then we got one that finally clicked. It's this drawing," Favreau says, tapping a full-color concept image by artist Chris Alzmann, now emblazoned on countless pieces of merchandise. In it, the Child sits in a bulky brown onesie with wide doe eyes and a slightly derpy expression. "That's him. This one," Favreau says. "He had kind of a goofy, ugly look. We didn't want him too cute." Part of his charm is that you feel a little pity for the guy, like Chaplin's Tramp or Charlie Brown.

There was never an alternate creature suggestion. It's not like we might have gotten a crustacean-like Baby Ackbar on lunch boxes, dolls, backpacks, and T-shirts. And we may never have gotten a Child at all if Lucasfilm hadn't solved another, even bigger problem with *The Mandalorian:* how to create a show that goes to new worlds in every episode without the backbreaking budgetary demands of shipping a crew to the farthest reaches of our own planet. "We were making series that were meant to sit alongside our films with a third of the budget and half the time," says Carrie Beck, a development and production executive at Lucasfilm who co-executive-produced *The Mandalorian.* "While it became a huge success, I feel like everybody's blood, sweat, and tears are on that screen."

Ironically, the thing that cleared their path was a wall.

THE CLUSTER OF bulky beige buildings in Manhattan Beach, a South Bay community near Los Angeles, looks as boring as any warehouse district. They are the khaki pants of architecture. Inside, at least two of these soundstages, however, are portals to other worlds.

After *The Mandalorian* debuted in late 2019, Lucasfilm's special effects division, Industrial Light & Magic, began to reveal details of the colossal curved LED wall they call The Volume that can envelop a film crew as effectively as any location shoot, generating an environment that's convincingly photorealistic, even to a digital camera. There's no need to ship a crew and props and actors anywhere. Everywhere can be brought to the studio. With three Volumes now in L.A., one in London, and one in Vancouver, film and TV creators are just beginning to discover its capabilities. The glow of dusk or dawn can last the whole workday if necessary. You can freeze the sun. Or, if you're shooting something set on Tatooine, you can freeze two of them.

Back in 2018, when *The Mandalorian* was first being planned, the tech was unsteady. Richard Bluff, supervisor of ILM's environments departments, had spent much of his career building virtual backdrops and knew The Volume (which ILM officially calls StageCraft) could be just what *The Mandalorian* needed. Without it, the show would either be too costly to produce or too chintzy to impress. The turning point came in the spring of

that year, when one of the most famously exacting directors of all time stopped by. "James Cameron came to visit," Bluff says. "He was next door working on the *Avatar* sequels in his water tank. Jon had asked for us to display on the monitors the test we'd shot earlier in the day."

This footage featured a Mandalorian stand-in pacing around the dilapidated ruins of an abandoned building, littered with debris and stained by water damage, with walls peeling like dead skin. The structure really exists and sits on Angel Island in San Francisco Bay. But the building's location had been scanned and imported to the LED screens, and the bounty hunter and his mirror-like armor seemed to have been transported into a decaying room. If anyone on earth could see the seams of the effect, it would be Cameron. "I remember distinctly Jim taking off his glasses and leaning close to look at the quality of the image and how convincing it was," Bluff says. "I think, for everybody, that afternoon was the eureka moment, because it was working."

Four years later, The Volume is an essential everyday tool. During a visit in mid-March, it conjures a rocky gray cavern, with cliffs embedded with large tech components. Whatever this place is, it's been colonized. On the flat ceiling of the studio, you can see the craggy roof of the cave, with a rough opening that lets light pour down from a circle of blue sky.

There's less clutter than other sets and virtually no dust. There's no smell of fresh paint, sculpted foam, or freshly cut lumber. The Volume has the sterile, ozone scent of a Best Buy as millions upon millions of tiny light-emitting diodes embedded in the curved surface evoke alien landscapes. Favreau shows off the stage like a man opening the hood of a newly restored classic car. Asked if the technology allows them to make a full season of television in the same amount of time as a *Star Wars* or Marvel movie, Favreau shakes his head: "No, it's like *half* the time."

One of the first outsiders to see The Volume was Pedro Pascal, when the actor was recruited by Favreau to lend a flinty presence to *The Mandalorian*'s antihero. "I knew that it was an ace in the hole. I just knew," Pascal says. "And I haven't been surprised by any of it. Maybe I've been a little surprised by how compelling the Mandalorian can be, because he's faceless."

But that had been a selling point for him too. The character, later revealed to be named Din Djarin, is such a hard-line devotee to Mandalorian rules that he scrupulously keeps his helmet on in the presence of others. That means Pascal can sometimes play the role as a voice actor while a stand-in wears the armor, which frees him to accept other projects. "Maybe I'm a little bit of a commitment-phobe," he says, "because the coolness of it really excites me, and the life span of it really intimidates me."

STAR WARS ACTORS tend to become *Star Wars* actors for life. In the late '90s, this led McGregor to agonize over playing the young Obi-Wan Kenobi in the prequel movies. "I really questioned it a lot," he says. "I felt like I was part of this new wave of British cinema, really, and that *Star Wars* wasn't me, that's not what I stood for. I was this sort of urban, grungy, independent film actor." The late Sir Alec Guinness notoriously looked down on the space saga when he played the wise old man in the original films. McGregor says he did too, especially after his first installment, 1999's *The Phantom Menace,* suffered punishing reviews: "It was hard because it was such a huge decision to do them, such a big event. It was quite difficult for all of us to deal with that, also knowing you've got a couple more to do."

McGregor was relieved to put the franchise behind him. But in 2017, he was invited to the El Capitan Theatre in Hollywood for a marathon screening of every *Star Wars* film. "They asked me if I would want to introduce one, and I've never done anything like that, but suddenly, it just struck me that I really *did* want to," McGregor recalls. Why had his feelings changed? "I don't know," he says, scratching a scruffy cheek. "I really do think it has to do with growing up." He enjoyed seeing people in sleeping bags, pulling an all-nighter with his movies. Kids who'd grown up with the prequels weren't as cynical as the critics. A few reviewers had even begun to reappraise them. People *loved* him as Obi-Wan, which made McGregor realize that he did too.

After the screening, McGregor started to get asked The Question nearly every time he gave an interview: *Would he ever consider playing Obi-Wan Kenobi again?* McGregor always answered in the affirmative, which is good politics but not a contractual obligation. The only time the question really mattered was when McGregor was asked by Lucasfilm's then head of story Kiri Hart about four years ago. "She just said, 'We just wanted to know if it's true. You've said you'd do it again. We want to know if you mean it,' " McGregor recalls. "And I said, 'Yeah, I do mean it. I would be happy to do it again.' "

> Late last year, Rosario Dawson seemed to accidentally in my email, and Star Wars was like, **'YOU MIGHT WANT**

Lucasfilm intended to make *Obi-Wan Kenobi* as a movie, to be directed by Oscar nominee Stephen Daldry. McGregor would be a producer this time, giving him more say over the story. "I just said, 'I think that it should be a story about a broken man, a man who's lost his faith,' " he says. "He always has a funny line to say or always seems to be calm and is a good warrior or soldier or whatever, but to see that man come apart, and see what gets him back together again—that's where we started."

When the *Obi-Wan* film later evolved into an *Obi-Wan* TV series as part of Lucasfilm's new yearning for Disney+ content, Daldry departed and Deborah Chow, a director from *The Mandalorian,* came aboard with the goal to keep the series cinematic in scope. There remained one missing component. McGregor's prequel costar, Hayden Christensen, had been Anakin Skywalker to his Obi-Wan, brothers-in-arms until their brutal battle on a lava flow in *Revenge of the Sith.* Still, in the early iterations of the Obi-Wan–in–exile story, Vader wasn't included.

It's an ongoing conundrum at Lucasfilm: How much should they showcase legacy characters and how much should they keep them in reserve? Would introducing Vader to a story about Obi-Wan's exile detract from their fateful meeting on the Death Star in 1977's *Star Wars,* when Vader strikes down his old friend?

Or could a previously unknown encounter actually enhance that moment? "We have these what-if conversations 24/7," says Michelle Rejwan, an executive producer of *Obi-Wan* and one of the company's lead development chiefs. "It's fun to, in your head, peruse the *Star Wars* toy store. 'Oh, we could have this character, or feature that ship.' But at the end of the day, we really need to keep it pure about *why*."

In the fall of 2019, Chow sat in Christensen's living room, asking him to return as the most fearsome tyrant in the galaxy. Logs crackled in the fireplace. A cup of herb, lemon, and ginger tea steamed in Chow's cup. Vader, she told Christensen, would add a new dimension that could ultimately reframe the way fans look at their classic duel in the original movie.

At the time of the meeting, it had been 14 years since *Revenge of the Sith,* and the actor assumed his galactic glory days were done. He was happy to be wrong. "This is a character that has come to define my life in so many ways," he says. "I was originally hired to play a very specific portion of this person's life. Most of my work was with Anakin. And now I get to come back and explore the character of Darth Vader."

Technically, you don't need Christensen for Vader—all you need is the mask, a hulking figure in the suit, and, if you're lucky, James Earl Jones's imperious voice. But you do need Christensen to show the audience the hotheaded but compassionate man who was lost when Anakin Skywalker became Vader. "A lot of my conversations with Deborah were about wanting to convey this feeling of strength, but also coupled with imprisonment," Christensen says. "There is this power *and* vulnerability, and I think that's an interesting space to explore."

When Chow became the showrunner, she championed a rematch between Vader and Kenobi as the Lucasfilm brain trust mulled whether to go that route. Meanwhile, soundstages had been booked in England and then canceled as the story underwent more internal scrutiny, sparking fears from fans that the show itself might go away too. In March 2020, shortly before lockdown began, the decision was finalized: Vader would return.

Part of Chow's successful perspective on "why" Vader and Kenobi should face each other again may surprise even the most ardent *Star Wars* fans, especially those who think of the two as harboring an epic contempt for one another. "For me, across the prequels, through the original trilogy, there's a love-story dynamic with these two that goes through the whole thing," Chow says. "I felt like it was quite hard to *not* [include] the person who left Kenobi in such anguish in the series." What intrigued her was the idea that despite what Vader had become, Kenobi might still care deeply about him. "I don't know how you could not," she says. "I don't think he ever will *not* care about him. What's special about that relationship is that they loved each other."

WHILE LUNA IS the kind of actor who huddles in the backseat of a car, hiding his *Star Wars* call from a probably oblivious driver, Rosario Dawson is the type who FaceTimes her friend's eight-year-old while in costume as alien Force-seeker Ahsoka, her full blue-and-white head tails framing burnt-umber makeup and white warrior markings. "I called my friend Paulina because her son Cosmo is a huge fan of *Star Wars,* knows every ship, every robot," says Dawson. "He sees me and throws the phone across the room. Just freaked out. I've gotten ice cream with this kid. We've hung out. But it was too much that this character he loves was starting to talk to him and said his name. She calls me back the next day and goes, 'Cosmo just walked into the room and told me: He's ready now.' I said, 'Well, that's very sweet, but I am no longer in costume. His moment is missed.'" She shrugs. "That will be a life lesson for him moving forward."

Dawson has the same enthusiasm for *Star Wars* as Cosmo. Her casting as Ahsoka Tano, who previously was voiced by Ashley Eckstein and existed only in animation, was the result of a fan suggestion that Lucasfilm took seriously. Someone tweeted Dawson a piece of art depicting her as the heroine, and she responded: "Ummm... Yes, please?" That made its way to Filoni, who had been working with Favreau to include Ahsoka in both *The Mandalorian* and later *The Book of Boba Fett*. His ultimate goal was to give Ahsoka her own TV series.

In October 2021, after Dawson had shot guest spots, she read a trade report about Christensen possibly joining her standalone show. Anakin Skywalker had been the character's mentor, and Vader's memory would understandably still haunt her. Dawson took a screenshot of the headline and opened Instagram, using the characters' nicknames for each other from *The Clone Wars* as a caption. "I just posted, 'Skyguy...They know!!! See you soon, Snips.'" Only later did she realize that the report was just an unconfirmed rumor. Fans took her post as hard confirmation, and the powers that be at Lucasfilm were distressed. "I looked in my email, and Star Wars was like, 'You might want to take that down,'" Dawson remembers. "I'm like, 'Man, I can't be trusted.'"

Ahsoka will appear on Disney+ in 2023, though Lucasfilm, eager to reclaim secrecy, still won't confirm if Dawson had inadvertently leaked the truth about Anakin or if it really was a false report. As with every *Star Wars* title, emotions and nostalgia are wrapped up in this series. Filoni, who's overseeing the show, helped create the title character with Lucas, and watched her become a touchstone to young girls who were drawn to "Snips" as the first lead female in the Jedi order. The quest Ahsoka has hinted at in her guest appearances on *The Mandalorian* and *Boba Fett,* hunting an Imperial grand admiral named Thrawn who vanished into deep space at the conclusion of the animated *Rebels* series, is likely to be explored further, although plot details are still being tightly held. "*Ahsoka* is a continuous story," Filoni offers. "It is definitely driving toward a goal, in my mind, as opposed to being little singular adventures. That's what I want the character to be doing, and I think that's what fans want now. They have such a relationship with her. I've only recently started to understand that all those kids that watched *Clone Wars* are now a lot older—they're very excited about all the things they grew up with, as they should be."

confirm a rumor with an Instagram post: "I looked **TO TAKE THAT DOWN.'** I'm like, 'Man, I can't be trusted.'"


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Foundry 3-2022
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SPACE FORCE
Dave Filoni, Deborah Chow, Jon Favreau, and Kathleen Kennedy on the Volume set that allows for travel to distant worlds inside a soundstage. Filoni, Chow, and Favreau first collaborated on *The Mandalorian*, but now Filoni is developing the *Ahsoka* series, and Chow is overseeing *Obi-Wan Kenobi*.

TO KEEP MINTING fans, Lucasfilm must give new generations their own collection of characters to love and hate, and not every classic character can be brought back endlessly anyway. Kennedy is well aware of all this now. In *The Mandalorian* and *The Book of Boba Fett,* Mark Hamill, 70, delivered performances as 30-something Luke Skywalker, but younger actors played Luke's body while advanced deepfake technology replaced the face. Bringing Luke to life is now a team sport. But that tech has its limitations. So does recasting.

The 2018 movie *Solo* explored Han Solo's younger years, with Alden Ehrenreich taking on the role of the smuggler originated by Harrison Ford. The film has its admirers, but it made less at the box office than any other live-action *Star Wars* movie. Solo's swagger may be too singular for another actor to replicate. "There should be moments along the way when you learn things," says Kennedy. "Now it does seem so abundantly clear that we can't do that."

To endure, *Star Wars* will need new actors, new characters, and a new era, vaulting away from the timeline as we know it. Another upcoming series, *The Acolyte,* reportedly starring Amandla Stenberg, aims to do that. The show is in the casting phase, but the writing is largely complete, says showrunner Leslye Headland, cocreator of the time-looping Netflix show *Russian Doll.* She has been planning for it for two years, mostly from the confines of her home. Her dog and cat, who peek in curiously from the background of Zoom conversations, are certainly steeped in the concept of the galaxy's High Republic era, she says, but casual *Star Wars* fans who haven't been following the recent novels and comics might still be unaware.

The Acolyte, Headland says, takes place roughly 100 years before *The Phantom Menace:* "A lot of those characters haven't even been born yet. We're taking a look at the political and personal and spiritual things that came up in a time period that we don't know much about. My question when watching *The Phantom Menace* was always like, 'Well, how did things get to this point?' How did we get to a point where a Sith lord can infiltrate the Senate and none of the Jedi pick up on it? Like, what went wrong? What are the scenarios that led us to this moment?"

Headland describes *The Acolyte* as a mystery thriller set in a prosperous and seemingly peaceful era, when the galaxy is still sleek and glistening. "We actually use the term the Renaissance, or the Age of Enlightenment," she says. Jedis were not always ascetic monklike figures living selflessly and bravely. "The Jedi uniforms are gold and white, and it's almost like they would never get dirty. They would never be out and about," Headland says. "The idea is that they could have these types of uniforms because that's how little they're getting into skirmishes."

Another new series on the horizon doesn't even have a title, just a code name: *Grammar Rodeo,* a reference to an episode of *The Simpsons* in which Bart and his schoolmates steal a car and run away for a week, using a phony educational event as an alibi. The show takes place during the post–*Return of the Jedi* reconstruction that follows the fall of the Empire, the same as *The Mandalorian,* but its plot remains a secret. It's created and executive-produced by director Jon Watts and writer Chris Ford, who made *Spider-Man: Homecoming* for Marvel. A casting notice has called for four children, around 11 to 12 years old. Inside Lucasfilm, the show is being described as a galactic version of classic Amblin coming-of-age adventure films of the '80s.

That leaves the question of what's happening with the *Star Wars* movies.



EASY BEING GREEN
Favreau cradles the animatronic puppet the world now knows as Baby Yoda. "We didn't want him too cute," he says.

"WE HAVE A road map," Kennedy says, although Lucasfilm's big-screen return is unlikely to follow the same relentless cadence as before. A movie from *Jojo Rabbit*'s Taika Waititi and *1917* screenwriter Krysty Wilson-Cairns will likely arrive first, with *Rogue Squadron* from *Wonder Woman* director Patty Jenkins



further off. Is it true that Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige will produce a *Star Wars* film? "I would love to see what movie he might come up with," Kennedy says. "But right now, no, there isn't anything specifically." And the trilogy from *The Last Jedi*'s Rian Johnson that was announced five years ago? Back-burnered. "Rian has been unbelievably busy with *Knives Out* and the deal that he made at Netflix for multiple movies."

The emphasis on television is already influencing the upcoming film slate. "I hesitate to use the word *trilogies* anymore because *Star Wars* is much more about *persistent* storytelling," Kennedy says. Now she just needs to recruit feature filmmakers.

On March 19, Kennedy and Lucas received the Milestone Award from the Producers Guild of America, and something happened to her while watching the video montage. The clips of the pair over the decades included a shirtless Lucas in a squirt-gun battle with Steven Spielberg, and Kennedy and Lucas joking around in a production-disrupting downpour. "What I was so taken with is how much fun we were having," she says. "It amounted to this moment of realization: I do think a little bit of fun has gone out of making these gigantic movies. The business, the stakes, everything that's been infused in the last 10 years or so. There's a kind of spontaneity and good time that we have to be careful to preserve. I keep holding on to: It better be fun."

After more than 50 years, with Lucasfilm navigating a new path, that's as good a lodestar to follow as any. ■

Substack cofounders Jairaj Sethi, Chris Best, and Hamish McKenzie in their San Francisco offices, March 16, 2022.



SUBSTACK'S COFOUNDERS CLAIM TO BE ON A MISSION TO FIX A BROKEN DISCOURSE, AND EVERYONE FROM SALMAN RUSHDIE TO PATTI SMITH IS GETTING IN ON THE ACT. BUT THE POPULAR NEWSLETTER PUBLISHER'S CULTURE-WAR PROBLEMS MAY JUST BE GETTING STARTED

LETTER MEN

By Joe Pompeo

Photograph by Krista Schlueter


EXIT

ONE DAY LAST JUNE, Patti Smith opened her laptop, typed a brief message to the thousands of readers of her Substack newsletter, and hit Send. "I would be grateful for any suggestions of songs you think I might try," she wrote. "Have a good week-end!"

Smith began using the rapidly expanding, increasingly influential, and sometimes controversial email publishing platform in March 2021. Coronavirus had put touring on hold, and Smith was working on *The Melting,* a sort of diary about life in the COVID era, when someone at Substack reached out. Smith was intrigued. Rather than pursuing a printed work that wouldn't see the light of day for another year or two, she decided to publish *The Melting* on Substack in real time. She signed one of the company's "pro" deals—the Substack equivalent of a book advance—and on March 31 sent out her first newsletter, offering readers a "journal of my private pandemic," as well as "weekly ruminations, shards of poetry, music, and musings on whatever subject finds its way from thought to pen."

Thirty-eight Substack emails later, Smith scrolled through the comments on her request for cover songs. One reader suggested "Pauper's Dough" by the Scottish musician King Creosote, né Kenny Anderson. Smith found the track on YouTube, instantly falling in love with its slow, plaintive melody and lyrics that she described in a subsequent post as "a poem to the people, the salt of the earth." She listened to it on repeat, memorizing the words and singing them as if they were her own. As luck would have it, Smith was due to perform in Anderson's home country for the opening night of the COP 26 Climate Change Conference in Glasgow. Four months after discovering Anderson through her Substack, Smith stood onstage with him in the darkness of Glasgow's Theatre Royal. "I just started crying," she told me. "We sang the song together and it was very moving. That was a real Substack moment."

Smith shared this story with me to convey her wholehearted embrace of Substack, which turns five this summer, half a decade after debuting with a promise to "accelerate the advent of what we are convinced will be a new golden age for publishing." Since its founding, in tandem with an industry-wide pivot toward digital subscriptions, Substack has aggressively pursued that goal, making it both a darling of the media world and a breakout star of Silicon Valley. More recently, the company has found itself on the front lines of the culture wars. Its laissez-faire approach to content moderation, which sometimes gives voice to objectionable figures booted from other platforms, has made Substack a lightning rod in the debate over regulating free speech. But even amid bursts of negative media coverage, Substack has maintained a large and loyal user base, and there are no signs of an exodus.

Smith, for her part, sees her eponymous newsletter as a sort of petri dish for what the medium can be. In addition to her serialized memoir and other miscellaneous writings, Smith uses Substack for audio messages, poetry readings, and photography. She opens her laptop at night and records impromptu videos, inviting fans into her white-walled bedroom. In February, for Smith's paying subscribers—$6 a month/$50 a year for unlimited access—she hosted a livestreamed performance from Electric Lady Studios, belting out classics like "Ghost Dance" and "Redondo Beach."

In its early days, Substack primarily catered to a certain set of internet-savvy writers and journalists, lured by the promise of monetizing a direct relationship with their readers. But as it morphs from a niche publishing concern into a heavyweight start-up mentioned in the same breath as Twitter and Facebook, its user base is proliferating accordingly. "I really like my Instagram, but it has specific boundaries, and this was something new," said Smith. "It makes me feel like, in the movies, where you see the reporter that goes to the phone booth and calls in her article. I feel a bit like that."

A YEAR AND A HALF AGO, in a column published in the pages of this magazine, I suggested that Substack "feels like a player that might just be on the cusp of the big leagues." Since then, Substack has raised an additional $65 million in venture capital, bringing its total funding to $82.4 million—led by mega-firm Andreessen Horowitz—and its valuation to a reported $650 million. Its head count is about 90, up from 10 at the start of the pandemic. In November the company, headquartered in San Francisco's Financial District, offered a tiny glimpse into its otherwise opaque revenues, saying it had surpassed a million paid subscriptions to Substack publications, the top 10 of which, out of hundreds of thousands, collectively bring in more than $20 million a year. (Substack typically skims off 10 percent of a newsletter's revenue, but individual deals vary; some writers take a lump sum in exchange for relinquishing 85 percent of their subscription dollars.) In addition to Smith, several other literary lions have joined Substack (Salman Rushdie, George Saunders, Roxanne Gay, Chuck Palahniuk, Joyce Carol Oates), which has also begun to attract celebrities of varying stripes (Padma Lakshmi, Nick Offerman, Dan Rather, Edward Snowden, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar). In February, President Joe Biden bypassed the long queue of print reporters clamoring for a sit-down and offered one instead to Heather Cox Richardson, the breakout history professor who became Substack's most-read writer last year. Substack also appears to have influenced strategy at major legacy news brands, like *The Atlantic* and *The New York Times,* which have been building out their own newsletter portfolios and, in some cases, vying for talent with Substack. They're not in Mark Zuckerberg territory just yet, but that appears to be the goal: Someone who's friendly with cofounder Hamish McKenzie told me he once said that Substack would be the next Facebook.

When I asked McKenzie about that, he didn't recall making the remark, but neither did he shy away from laying out the company's ambitions. "We're not here to build a small boutique business and just hope for the best, and hope that Google doesn't crush us one day, or Amazon doesn't crush us one day," he said. "What we are trying to do is build a true alternative to the attention economy."

McKenzie, a 40-year-old New Zealander who lives in San Francisco with his wife and two kids, is Substack's de facto ambassador to the media. Slim and clean-cut, McKenzie grew up in a rural wine and farming region, where his father worked as an atmospheric scientist and his mother a high school language and culture teacher. At the University of Otago in New Zealand's southeast, McKenzie got into journalism, which brought him to Canada's University of Western Ontario for graduate school. In 2006, he moved to Hong Kong and freelanced before helping create Hong Kong's edition of *Time Out*. Two years later, he joined the American woman who would become his wife, Stephanie Wang, in the United States, eventually landing a reporting gig at PandoDaily, the now defunct technology news website. "He seemed very, like, 'I wanna shake things up,'" remembers Paul Carr, Pando's former editorial director. "You could tell he had big ideas."

At Pando, McKenzie's coverage of Tesla and SpaceX caught the attention of an editor who approached him about doing an Elon Musk book. Without a direct line to the elusive billionaire, McKenzie went to the personal website of Musk's dietitian mother, found an email address for her, and reached out, seeking advice on the best way to approach her son. "To my horror," McKenzie recalls, "she just forwarded that email straight to Elon"—*busted!*—"and then Elon had his P.R. person call me right away." Musk, as it happened, was familiar with McKenzie's work and agreed to a call, except he wasn't keen on participating in a book. "Have you ever thought about going corporate?" he asked McKenzie, who met with Musk about a job at Tesla. McKenzie tried to talk Musk into doing a book anyway but got nowhere. He became a writer for Tesla's communications team instead, sticking it out for more than a year before heeding the siren call of his Musk project, *Insane Mode,* which he left the company to write in 2015. Musk still didn't participate, but McKenzie shared the manuscript prior to publication. "It wasn't smooth sailing," McKenzie told me.

While working on *Insane Mode,* McKenzie took a part-time job doing comms for the messaging app Kik, where he became friends with Chris Best, the company's CTO. Best, a 34-year-old computer wonk who grew up outside Vancouver, had cofounded Kik in 2009 as he was finishing the systems design engineering program at the University of Waterloo in Ontario. In early 2017, Best left Kik and decided to take a year off. "I started writing," he told me. "One of the things that had been swirling in my head was, like, Hey, I think our media ecosystem has gotten insane! And I wrote basically an essay or a blog post or something." Best shared the piece with McKenzie and asked for feedback. "He was bemoaning the state of the world and how it led to this growing divide in society, and how the things that were being rewarded were cheap outrage and flame wars," McKenzie recalls. "I was like, 'Yeah, this is right, and everyone who works in media knows that these are the problems. But what no one knows is how to do something about it. What's a better way? What's a solution?'"

Their solution turned out to be Substack. "We were both readers of Stratechery," Ben Thompson's influential, largely paid newsletter about the business of tech and media, says McKenzie, "and we're like, 'Yes, the model does work really well. We're both happy subscribers, paying subscribers to Stratechery. Why don't more people try it?'... It was simple enough to be appealing and convincing to me that it was worth a shot."

To round out the team, they brought in fellow Kik alumnus Jairaj Sethi, who was born and raised in Japan before attending the University of Waterloo, where he overlapped with Best. "He won me over with the mission of how simple and obvious and real it was," says Sethi. "I've worked at a bunch of tech companies, and everybody had this mentality that you just have to build something that gets a lot of users, a fancy valuation, and one day it becomes a success. The pitch for Substack was the exact opposite. No buzzwords, no A.I. or crypto or this or that. It was just, there's a systemic problem, and it's not like we need to invent new technology to fix it. There's no magic here."

In Substack's introductory post on July 17, 2017, explaining a vision in which "publishers of news and similar content can be profitable through direct payments from readers," Best and McKenzie evoked the 1833 debut of Benjamin Day's *New York Sun,* which ushered in media's ad-supported model by combining mass circulation with a rock-bottom price. "Benjamin Day radically altered the future of journalism with a tweak to its funding model," Best and McKenzie wrote. "Almost two centuries later, the news industry is ready for another reinvention."

Substack has, to an extent, lived up to that promise, at least for a privileged set of users with substantial followings. It's become a haven for writers who find, for one reason or another, that traditional media no longer works for them. Substack will never be able to offer the deep institutional backing and editorial muscle that comes with working at a place like *The New York Times.* But it's able to provide limited assistance with editing, legal, design,

"We're not here to build A SMALL BOUTIQUE BUSINESS and just hope for the best, and hope that Google doesn't crush us one day....

photo subscriptions, and health coverage, never mind back-end functions like a content management system and tech support. "This late in my career—I'm 44 now—being a freelancer is like, no matter how many times you prove you can do it, you feel like you're going around with your hat in your hand every day, reapplying for a job you've already had," says Luke O'Neil, who wrote for mainstream outlets before McKenzie recruited him in 2018 to Substack, where he now makes about $100,000 a year (before Substack's cut) publishing the newsletter Welcome to Hell World. Emily Nunn, a veteran food journalist and former *New Yorker* arts editor who writes a popular newsletter about salad, echoed those sentiments when Substack invited her to speak at a company Zoom session. Nunn told the group that, as a woman in her early 60s, her career options had become limited, but Substack gave her a second act. "I'm working harder than I've ever worked at any job, and yet it's a complete pleasure," she said. "I just feel like Substack is filling this gap in journalism that the right people are taking advantage of."

That includes people who aren't professional writers. Katelyn Jetelina, a professor of epidemiology at the University of Texas, came to Substack on a whim in February 2021 after a hacking situation locked her out of Facebook, where she had been sharing public health expertise under the title Your Local Epidemiologist. Jetelina's Substack newsletter of the same name now goes out to roughly 130,000 readers, roughly 10 percent of whom pay for perks such as commenting. She made about $300,000 in the first nine months. "It's the most fulfilling thing I've done in my career," Jetelina told me.

Substack has also provided a soft landing for the Glenn Greenwalds and Andrew Sullivans and Bari Weisses of the world, who've positioned themselves as being cast out of polite media society, as it were, and are now making bank on Substack. The literati also appear to be reaping the platform's financial and creative rewards. "I'm enjoying it so far," said Rushdie. Saunders, who designed his Substack as a sort of biweekly lit mag meets virtual MFA program, sounded like a happy customer when he spoke to me after debuting Story Club with George Saunders. "People are really there to learn, acting like serious students," he said. "All kinds of connections are being made. "

It's not all roses. Some users have already burned out, which raises the question of how many people with a coveted pro deal will find Substack's grind unsustainable once they exhaust their advances. At the same time, many other writers simply won't be able to make a living on Substack no matter how hard they try. But nevertheless, Substack's growing cast of luminaries, whether noted authors or high-profile journalists lured away from traditional outlets, has gone a long way in burnishing the company's public profile. "Substack has captivated an anxious industry," wrote Ben Smith—who himself turned down a Substack deal worth roughly $500,000, he has told people—in a buzzy *Times* column last year.

As many start-ups know all too well, buzz is often followed by backlash. For Substack, the backlash may only have just begun.

ON JANUARY 27, a short YouTube video appeared on the website of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, an NGO that "seeks to disrupt the architecture of online hate and misinformation." Set to a menacing tune, the video declares, "Anti-vaxxers are making millions spreading misinformation through their outbox. Who are they?" Up pops a photo of Joseph Mercola, alongside a *New York Times* headline proclaiming him "The Most Influential Spreader of Coronavirus Misinformation Online." Next appears Alex Berenson, side by side with an *Atlantic* article that coined him "The Pandemic's Wrongest Man." Mercola had been restricted by YouTube and Facebook; Berenson had been kicked off Twitter. But Substack had no qualms. According to the center's estimate, "five popular anti-vaccine newsletters" generate "at least $2.5 million a year," more than $2.2 million of which comes from Mercola's and Berenson's newsletters alone. "Substack makes 10 percent profit off of their lies. It's got to stop," the video concludes. (In a public statement at the time, Berenson said the criticism showed Substack was "under pressure"; Mercola suggested people were "panicked over Substack's growth.")

This wasn't the first time Substack came under fire for its content policies. Last March, the company drew scrutiny following the defection of several Substackers who took their newsletters elsewhere rather than stay on a platform that makes money off writers who are highly offensive to the trans community, such as Graham Linehan, an Irish comedy writer whose Twitter account had been shut down after "repeated violations of our rules against hateful conduct." "I think of myself as having decent critical faculties, but somehow I got suckered again by a bog-standard publishing venture masquerading as a useful communications tool," wrote Annalee Newitz, while the poet Yanyi agreed, "I have no faith that Substack will protect me or other trans people from harassment or abuse."

The exit post that got the most attention came from Jude Doyle, who was recruited by McKenzie in Substack's early days. "I have major ethical concerns about continuing to take Hamish's offer," wrote Doyle, who later told me, "I see Substack, under the cover of freedom of speech, allowing some really horrendous viewpoints to enter the mainstream.... It no longer felt good or right." (Other trans writers, such as Daniel Lavery and Charlotte Clymer, continue to publish Substack newsletters.)

Substack didn't just hold firm, it doubled down. When Netflix got slammed for a Dave Chappelle comedy special with transphobic material, Best declared at a *Wall Street Journal* conference, "Dave, if you're listening, come to Substack."

The anti-vax imbroglio turned into a bigger headache, partly because it coincided with a similar public relations crisis at

"What we are trying to do is BUILD A TRUE ALTERNATIVE to the attention economy."

Spotify over Joe Rogan. The research published by the Center for Countering Digital Hate garnered mainstream coverage in outlets like *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post,* giving pause to Substack users from the scientific community. "For the time being, I will continue to post on Substack as I believe there's a serious lack of ground truths about the pandemic," wrote Eric Topol, a medical professor and ubiquitous COVID commentator. "I'll be reflecting on whether this platform is a suitable channel for writing such posts."

Substack was now getting a taste of the agita that the megaplatforms knew all too well, but the founders held their ground in a thousand-word post of their own: "We make decisions based on principles not PR, we will defend free expression, and we will stick to our hands-off approach to content moderation."

This stance has put McKenzie at odds even with people who consider him a friend. "Hamish and I became somewhat buddies," said Welcome to Hell World's O'Neil. "I still like him and wish him well, but I've had a lot of angry exchanges with him." Carr, McKenzie's former PandoDaily editor, shared a series of emails he exchanged with McKenzie last year after Carr discontinued his Substack. "I get the free speech argument but there has to be a line. Surely," Carr wrote. "I think you've hit upon the dilemma that's at the center of everything right now: anti-vaxxing, violent sedition, abortion, gun control, trans rights and of course tech. At what point does someone's right to free speech outweigh another's right to live without fearing for their lives? At what point do people like you and me have a moral responsibility to protect the vulnerable from violent bullies?"

In early January, I was on a Zoom with McKenzie asking him about these very issues. I pulled up Substack's content guidelines and noted that they prohibit hate, threats, violence, criminal behavior, doxing, plagiarism, even pornography. They don't say anything about misinformation and disinformation. If Twitter and Facebook and YouTube are at least trying to moderate such content on their platforms, why not Substack?

"Our content guidelines protect the platform at the extremes while providing a high bar for intervention but also give us the ability to intervene when it's necessary. I'm not going to say any more than that," McKenzie replied. (He told me Substack had taken the step of deactivating accounts but wouldn't specify how many times.) "Facebook and Twitter and others who are taking a harder-line approach to content moderation are more obliged to, because they're amplification machines, because of the design of their systems. They are giving you news feeds that are sorted by content that is highly engaging. It encourages the production of this divisive content. These are the world's most powerful machines ever to encourage the spread of disinformation, and so the burden of action on them is higher."

I suggested that Substack's day of reckoning may still lie ahead. The bigger Substack gets, the more ideologically diverse its author pool becomes, the greater the chances for highly inflammatory, potentially harmful content. (Imagine, say, a QAnon Substack?) "I think as Substack grows, the tests will become more frequent and more difficult," said McKenzie. "That's unavoidable. This is not ever going to be a not-difficult problem. At the same time, I don't think that Substack, as a publishing ecosystem, is as attractive to those other movements—what's a good way to phrase what they are?"

Cults?

"Cults," McKenzie agreed. "If you're trying to start a cult, then going to a system that allows you to send emails to people might get you some of the way there, but it's not going to be anything compared to going to a system that allows you to broadcast a message instantly to the world and have that reshared and commented on by millions of people."

IT WASN'T LONG before Substack got back to promoting good news about the company. On March 9, it debuted a Substack app that had been in the works for months, enabling readers to access all of their favorite Substack newsletters in one place. The launch of a new app barely qualifies as news these days, but this one actually signaled a notable shift for Substack, which, until now, had never existed as a single navigable ecosystem. There's no algorithm on the app that surfaces content a reader hasn't signed up for, which means any Substack consumer can perfectly tailor his or her environment.

Substack appears to be evolving in other ways as well. Late last year, Hollywood journalist Richard Rushfield announced he would be turning his influential Substack newsletter, The Ankler, into a start-up of its own, teaming up with former *Hollywood Reporter* editorial director Janice Min to expand The Ankler into a full-fledged media company. The duo initially approached other companies, including Axios, about bringing The Ankler under their umbrella. But McKenzie convinced them to stick with Substack.

The company is also widening out beyond the core "email newsletter" format, making it easier for users to publish podcasts and videos, like the ones Patti Smith has been broadcasting from her bedroom. "We'll see more formats, definitely," said Best, who teased out another future development: "You'll see international expansion."

There are any number of other directions Substack could take. Maybe it will become a hot spot for literary agents seeking lucrative deals. Maybe it will become a pipeline for film and television and audio adaptations. Maybe there will come a point when brands and celebrities and even media outlets have to be on Substack just as much as they have to be on Instagram and Facebook. Or maybe, in another five years, we'll all look back on Substack and remember when it was the hot new thing, only to have fizzled.

"There's a chance," McKenzie conceded. But then he started talking like a founder. "This year we passed a million paid subscriptions, which is a crazy number. But it's also a confidence-giving number, because we felt when we were starting, well, if we could get 10,000 people paying writers on Substack, then there doesn't seem to be any logic that suggests you can't get 100,000. And I'm not sure why I'd have to stop at 1 million. Like, why not 10 million? If you can get 10 million, then maybe you can get 100 million. If you've got 100 million people paying writers directly, paying creative people directly, then the effect is going to be profound."

A tall order indeed.

"I don't want to come across," said McKenzie, "as one of these guys that's like, 'What's cooler than a million dollars? A billion dollars!' These are difficult things to do. Building a company alone is difficult, and the company can vanish for reasons outside of your control at any moment. But we are earnest in our effort here to build something better than what the world has right now." ■

BY
KATHERINE EBAN

ILLUSTRATION BY
MICHELLE THOMPSON

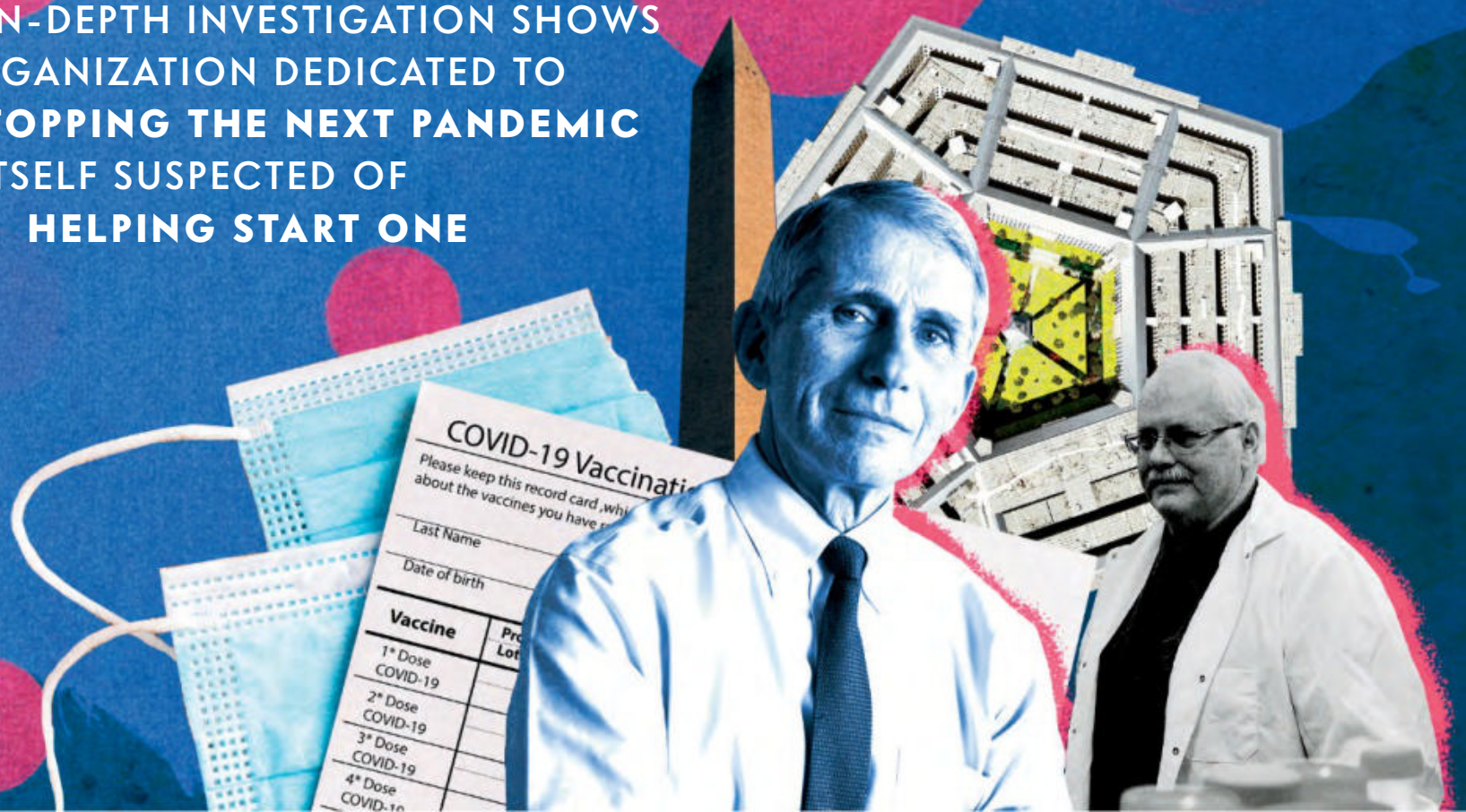
Action Item 3: EcoHealth Alliance will trademark the name and content (where possible) in the two-page 'Emerging Disease Insights', **ongoing**

Alliance will pursue ArcelorMittal as a potential FY 17

EHA will include potential ways to diversify funding in the FY 18-FY 20

RISKY BUSINESS

CHASING SCIENTIFIC RENOWN, GRANT DOLLARS, AND APPROVAL FROM **DR. ANTHONY FAUCI,** **PETER DASZAK** TRANSFORMED AN ENVIRONMENTAL NONPROFIT INTO A U.S.-FUNDED SPONSOR OF **CONTROVERSIAL VIRUS RESEARCH** IN CHINA. AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATION SHOWS HOW AN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO **STOPPING THE NEXT PANDEMIC** FOUND ITSELF SUSPECTED OF **HELPING START ONE**



On June 18, 2021, an evolutionary biologist named Jesse D. Bloom sent the draft of an unpublished scientific paper he'd written to Dr. Anthony Fauci, the chief medical adviser to the president of the United States.

The paper he had written—known as a preprint, because it had yet to be peer-reviewed or published—contained sensitive revelations about the National Institutes of Health, the federal agency that oversees biomedical research. In the interest of transparency, he wanted Fauci, who helms an NIH subagency, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), to see it ahead of time. Under ordinary circumstances, the preprint might have sparked a respectful exchange of views. But this was no ordinary preprint, and no ordinary moment.

More than a year into the pandemic, the genesis of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, was still a mystery. Most scientists believed that it had made the leap from bats to humans naturally, via an intermediary species, most likely at a market in Wuhan, China, where live wild animals were slaughtered and sold. But a growing contingent were asking if it could have originated inside a nearby laboratory that is known to have conducted risky coronavirus research funded in part by the United States. As speculation swirled, the NIH was being bombarded by Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuits. Fauci himself needed a security detail, owing to death threats from conspiracy theorists.

Bloom had discovered that a number of early SARS-CoV-2 genomic sequences mentioned in a published paper from China had vanished without a trace. The sequences, which map a virus's unique genetic identity, are key to tracking a pandemic's early spread. Bloom wondered if their disappearance meant that the Chinese government was trying to hide evidence. Piecing together clues, Bloom established that the NIH itself had deleted the sequences from its own archive at the request of researchers in Wuhan. Now, he was hoping Fauci and his boss, NIH director Francis Collins, could identify other deleted sequences that might shed light on the mystery.

Bloom had submitted the paper to a preprint server, a repository of scientific papers awaiting peer review, on the same day he'd sent a copy to Fauci and Collins.

Collins organized a Zoom meeting for Sunday, June 20. He invited two outside scientists, evolutionary biologist Kristian Andersen and virologist Robert Garry, and allowed Bloom to do the same. Bloom recommended Sergei Pond, an evolutionary biologist, and Rasmus Nielsen, a genetic biologist. That it was shaping up like an old-fashioned duel with seconds in attendance did not cross Bloom's mind. But six months later, he remained so disturbed by the meeting that he wrote a detailed account, which *Vanity Fair* obtained.

After Bloom described his research, the Zoom meeting became "extremely contentious," he wrote. Andersen said he found the preprint "deeply troubling." If the Chinese scientists wanted to delete their sequences from the database, which NIH policy entitled them to do, it was unethical for Bloom to analyze them further, he claimed. And there was nothing unusual about the early genomic sequences in Wuhan. Instantly, Nielsen and Andersen were "yelling at each other," Bloom recounted, with Nielsen insisting that the sequences were "extremely puzzling."

Bloom wrote that Andersen—who'd had some of his emails with Fauci from early in the pandemic publicly released through FOIA requests—leveled a third objection: that Bloom's preprint "would fuel conspiratorial notions that China was hiding data and thereby lead to more criticism of scientists such as himself." Fauci then weighed in, objecting to the preprint's description of Chinese scientists "surreptitiously" deleting the sequences. The word was loaded, said Fauci, and the reason they'd asked for the deletions was unknown.

That's when, according to Bloom, Andersen made a surprising suggestion. He said he was a screener at the preprint server, which gave him access to papers that weren't yet public. He offered to either entirely delete the preprint or revise it "in a way that would leave no record that this had been done." Bloom refused.

At that point, both Fauci and Collins distanced themselves from Andersen's offer, with Fauci saying, as Bloom recalled, "Just for the record, I want to be clear that I never suggested you delete or revise the preprint."

Both Andersen and Garry denied that anyone in the meeting suggested deleting or revising the paper. Andersen said Bloom's account was "false." Garry dismissed it as "nonsense." Pond, however, confirmed Bloom's account as accurate. A spokesperson for Fauci declined to comment.

THE WAGON-CIRCLING ON that Zoom call reflected a siege mentality at the NIH whose cause was much larger than Bloom and the missing sequences. It all began with a once-obscure science nonprofit in Manhattan that had become the conduit for federal grant money to a Wuhan research laboratory.

In 2014, Fauci's agency had issued a $3.7 million grant to EcoHealth Alliance, a nongovernmental organization dedicated to predicting and helping to prevent the next pandemic by identifying viruses that could leap from wildlife to humans. The grant, titled Understanding the Risk of Bat Coronavirus Emergence, proposed to collect and analyze bat viruses and build predictive models to assess their risk of infecting humans. The Wuhan Institute of Virology (WIV) was a key collaborator to whom EcoHealth Alliance gave almost

Previous spread: EcoHealth Alliance president Peter Daszak funneled U.S. grant dollars allocated by Dr. Anthony Fauci to virologists Ralph Baric in North Carolina and Shi Zhengli (far left) in Wuhan.

PREVIOUS SPREAD, WUHAN INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY: KYODO NEWS. FAUCI: TOM WILLIAMS/CQ ROLL CALL, UNITED NATIONS: DOUG ARMAND. BARIC: CHRISTOPHER JANARO/BLOOMBERG. PENTAGON: VONKARAI/ISTOCK. VACCINE CARD AND FACE MASKS: VIOREL POPARCEA/ISTOCK. VESSEL: GUMMYBONE/ISTOCK. COVID MODEL: SAUL LOEB. SHI: JOHANNES EISELE. WASHINGTON MONUMENT: ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS. MANHATTAN ISLAND: FRANCIS MBUYA. ALL: GETTY IMAGES. DASZAK: THOMAS PETER/REUTERS. CANADIAN FLOCKS: ALGIRDAS GRIGAITIS. ALL: ALAMY. BAT: RUDMER ZWERVER. MOUSE: MASLOV DMITRY. ALL: SHUTTERSTOCK.

$600,000 in sub-awards. But the work there had been controversial enough that the NIH suspended the grant in July 2020.

As it happened, EcoHealth Alliance failed to predict the COVID-19 pandemic—even though it erupted into view at the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market, a short drive from the WIV itself. In the ensuing months, every move of EcoHealth Alliance's voluble president, Peter Daszak, came under scrutiny by a small army of scientific sleuths and assorted journalists. Why had he been so cagey about the work his organization had been funding at the WIV?

In 2018, Daszak had appeared on Chinese state-run TV and said, "The work we do with Chinese collaborators is published jointly in international journals, and the sequence data is uploaded onto the internet free for everyone to read." He added, "Science is naturally transparent and open.... You do something, you discover something, you want to tell the world about it."

But as COVID-19 rampaged across the globe, the Chinese government refused to share raw data from early patient cases or participate in any further international efforts to investigate the virus's origin. And in September 2019, three months before the officially recognized start of the pandemic, the WIV took down its database of some 22,000 virus samples and sequences, refusing to restore it despite international requests.

In the U.S., meanwhile, Daszak early on set about covertly organizing a letter in *The Lancet* medical journal that sought to present the lab-leak hypothesis as a groundless conspiracy theory. And Fauci and a small group of scientists, including Andersen and Garry, worked to enshrine the natural-origin theory during confidential discussions in early February 2020, even though several of them privately expressed that they felt a lab-related incident was likelier. Just days before those discussions began, *Vanity Fair* has learned, Dr. Robert Redfield, a virologist and the director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, had urged Fauci privately to vigorously investigate both the lab and natural hypotheses. He was then excluded from the ensuing discussions—learning only later that they'd even occurred. "Their goal was to have a single narrative," Redfield told *Vanity Fair.*

Why top scientists linked arms to tamp down public speculation about a lab leak remains unclear. Was it simply because their views shifted in favor of a natural origin? Could it have been to protect against a revelation that could prove fatal to certain risky research that they deem indispensable? Or to protect vast streams of grant money from political interference or government regulation?

The effort to close the debate in favor of the natural-origin hypothesis continues today. In February, *The New York Times* gave front-page treatment to a set of preprints—written by Michael Worobey at the University of Arizona and 17 coauthors, including Andersen and Garry—claiming that a new analysis of public data from the Huanan market in Wuhan provided "dispositive evidence" that the virus first leapt to humans from animals sold there. But a number of top scientists, Bloom among them, questioned that assertion.

"Some scientists seem almost hellbent on naming the Huanan market as the site of the origin of the pandemic, and some members of the media seem more than happy to embrace these conclusions without careful examination," said Stanford microbiologist David Relman.

Daszak—a Western scientist immersed in Chinese coronavirus research at the WIV—was uniquely positioned to help the world crack open the origin mystery, not least by sharing what he knew. But last year, Jeffrey Sachs, the Columbia University economist who oversees *The Lancet*'s COVID-19 commission, dismissed Daszak from the helm of a task force investigating the virus's genesis after he flatly refused to share progress reports from his contested research grant. (In written responses to detailed questions, Daszak said he was "simply following NIH guidance" when he declined Sachs's request. He added the reports are now public.)

"[Daszak] and NIH have acted badly," Sachs told *Vanity Fair.* "There has been a lack of transparency...and there is a lot more to know and that can be known." He said that the NIH should support an "independent scientific investigation" to examine the "possible role" in the pandemic of the NIH, EcoHealth Alliance, the Wuhan Institute of Virology, and a partner laboratory at the University of North Carolina. ("We are also on record as welcoming independent scientific investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic," Daszak said.)

This story is based on more than 100,000 internal EcoHealth Alliance documents obtained by *Vanity Fair,* almost all of which predate the pandemic, as well as interviews with five former staff members and 33 other sources. While the documents do not tell us where COVID-19 came from, they shed light on the world in which EcoHealth Alliance has operated: one of murky grant agreements, flimsy oversight, and the pursuit of government funds for scientific advancement, in part by pitching research of steeply escalating risk.

"FAUCI NORMALLY **SAYS NO** TO **ALMOST EVERYTHING** LIKE THIS. UNLESS **ABC, NBC, CBS,** AND **FOX** ARE ALL THERE WITH **CAMERAS RUNNING.**"

THE STORY OF how Daszak's grant entangled Fauci in the specter of Wuhan coronavirus research began years earlier, at a stately Beaux Arts social club in Washington, D.C. For more than a decade, EcoHealth Alliance hosted a series of cocktail parties at the Cosmos Club near DuPont Circle to discuss the prevention of viral outbreaks. There, scientists and journalists mingled with the true guests of honor: federal government bureaucrats who were in the position to steer grants.

On invitations, EcoHealth Alliance described the events as "educational." Inside the nonprofit, however, officials called them "cultivation events." For about $8,000 in Brie and Chardonnay per event, they got to network with

prospective federal funders. As the organization's 2018 strategic plan spelled out, "Given our strength in federal funding, we enhanced our cultivation events at the Cosmos Club in Washington DC, which now regularly attract 75-150 people at high levels in govt agencies, NGOs and the private sector." ("These kinds of events are common among many nongovernmental organizations and nonprofits," Daszak told *Vanity Fair*.)

Of all those high-level people, almost no one ranked as high as Fauci, a scientific kingmaker who dispensed billions in grant money each year—and Daszak was determined to share a podium with him. On September 9, 2013, Daszak emailed Fauci's senior adviser, David Morens, to see if the sought-after NIAID chief would be available as a panel speaker. Morens emailed back, recommending that Daszak "write Tony directly, thanking him for meeting with you all recently and then inviting him to be a member of this Cosmos Club discussion. That way, it is personal and doesn't look 'cooked' by us."

Though Fauci declined that invitation and several others, Daszak kept trying. In February 2016, Morens passed along a valuable tip: Fauci "normally says no to almost everything like this. Unless ABC, NBC, CBS, and Fox are all there with cameras running. If he were asked to give THE main talk or the only talk that might increase the chances."

The gambit worked. Fauci signed on to give a presentation on the Zika virus at the Cosmos Club on March 30, and the RSVPs flowed in. The guests came from an array of deep-pocketed federal agencies: the Department of Homeland Security, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Pentagon, even NASA. As Daszak would declare at a board meeting on December 15, the "Washington, DC cultivation events have been a great way to increase our visibility to federal funders," according to meeting minutes.

IF A SHARED podium with Fauci proved that Daszak had become a true player among virus hunters, it also underscored just how far he had come. For years, Daszak sat at the helm of a struggling nonprofit with a mission to save manatees, promote responsible pet ownership, and celebrate threatened species. Balding and usually clad in hiking gear, Daszak was one part salesman, one part visionary. He saw clearly that human incursions into the natural world could lead to the emergence of animal pathogens, with bats a particularly potent reservoir.

The bioterror attacks of 2001, in which letters dusted with anthrax spores were sent through the U.S. mail, coupled with the first SARS coronavirus outbreak in China the following year, would bring money for the study of lethal natural pathogens pouring into federal agencies. In 2003, the NIAID got an eye-popping $1.7 billion for research to defend against bioterrorism.

Daszak's office on Manhattan's far West Side didn't have a laboratory. The closest bat colonies were in Central Park. But he cultivated an affiliation with Shi Zhengli, a Chinese scientist who would rise to become the director of the Wuhan Institute of Virology's Center for Emerging Infectious Diseases. Slight and sophisticated, with an international education, Shi became known in China as "bat woman" for her fearless exploration of their habitats. Daszak's alliance with her would open China's bat caves to him.

In 2005, after conducting field research in four locations in China, Daszak and Shi coauthored their first paper together, which established that horseshoe bats were a likely reservoir for SARS-like coronaviruses. They would go on to collaborate on 17 papers and were the first to report that a SARS-like bat coronavirus might be able to infect human cells without first jumping to an intermediate animal. "[Peter] respected her," said a former EcoHealth Alliance staffer. "In the view of everyone, they were doing great work for the world."

"Zhengli is not one to stand on formality; she makes dumplings by hand with her students in the lab!!" Daszak's chief of staff wrote to another employee. "She got her PhD in France, loves red wine, and likes good food above formality."

By 2009, bats had turned into big money. That September, USAID awarded a $75 million grant called PREDICT to four organizations, including Daszak's. It was "the most comprehensive zoonotic virus surveillance project in the world," USAID stated, and its purpose was to identify and predict viral emergence, in part by sampling and testing bats and other wildlife in remote locations.

The $18 million over five years awarded to what was then Wildlife Trust was a "game-changer," Daszak told his staff in an ecstatic email sharing the news. "I want to take this opportunity (despite 7 hours of drinking champagne—literally!) to thank all of you for your support."

The money transformed the ragged nonprofit. It increased its budget by half, ending a yearslong operating loss, and began a long-deferred rebranding, which led to the new name EcoHealth Alliance. Over the course of the grant, the organization allocated $1.1 million to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, USAID recently acknowledged in a letter to Congress.

WHEN DR. MAUREEN Miller, an infectious disease epidemiologist, arrived at EcoHealth Alliance in 2014, she landed in an environment that she found to be toxic and secretive. She soon came to believe that she was hired "because they needed a senior-level

ALLOWING SUCH RISKY RESEARCH TO GO FORWARD AT THE WUHAN INSTITUTE OF VIROLOGY WAS "SIMPLY CRAZY."

As Daszak's staff and Shi's graduate students intermingled, traveling between Wuhan and Manhattan, the exchange flourished. When Shi visited New York, the EcoHealth staff carefully selected a restaurant for a celebratory dinner.

woman," she said, adding, "I was excluded from pretty much everything."

Miller began creating a surveillance strategy to detect zoonotic virus spillover. Chinese villagers living near bat caves would have their blood tested for



antibodies to a SARS-like coronavirus, then answer questionnaires to determine if certain behaviors had led them to be exposed. It was a "biological and behavioral warning system," Miller explained.

Over the next two years, Miller worked closely with Shi, who developed the test to screen the villagers' blood. In that time, Miller noted, "I never got a result from [Shi] via phone. I had to show up in China to learn anything from her." From that, Miller gleaned that, while Shi was a "world-class scientist, she respects the Chinese system." In short, she followed the Chinese government's rules. (Shi did not respond to written questions.)

Miller left EcoHealth Alliance in November 2016. A year later, Shi alerted Miller's former assistant to the fact that Daszak was about to get credit for her work in an upcoming publication. "Shi went out of her way to ensure I would be included," Miller said. The final version of a letter, published in January 2018 in the Wuhan Institute of Virology's journal, *Virologica Sinica,* included Miller's name. Six out of 218 villagers had tested positive for antibodies, suggesting that the strategy was a successful way to gauge potential spillover.

The experience left Miller with a dark impression of Daszak: "He is so single-minded that he wants to be the one who makes the discovery, without having to share."

Daszak said Miller has been credited as a coauthor on at least eight papers stemming from her work at EcoHealth Alliance, "a testimony to the equity, fairness, and openness of our publication and authorship practices." He added that the nonprofit's staff is "diverse and culturally sensitive."

DASZAK'S $3.7 MILLION NIH grant first set off alarm bells in early May 2016. The NIH requires annual progress reports, but Daszak's year two report was late and the agency threatened to withhold funds until he filed it.

The report he finally did submit worried the agency's grant specialists. It stated that scientists planned to create an infectious clone of MERS, a novel coronavirus found in dromedaries that had emerged in Saudi Arabia in 2012 and killed 35 percent of the humans it infected. The report also made clear that the NIH grant had already been used to construct two chimeric coronaviruses similar to the one that caused SARS, which emerged in 2002 and went on to cause at least 774 deaths worldwide. (A chimeric virus is one that combines fragments of different viruses.) These revelations prompted the NIH's grant specialists to ask whether the work

Former CDC director Robert Redfield says Dr. Anthony Fauci and others wanted "a single narrative." Former deputy national security adviser Matt Pottinger says Chinese military scientists were active at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

WHITE HOUSE: JGROUP/ISTOCK. POTTINGER: JABIN BOTSFORD/*THE WASHINGTON POST*. REDFIELD: DREW ANGERER. ALL: GETTY IMAGES. CDC: ROB HAINER/SHUTTERSTOCK.

should be subject to a federal moratorium on gain-of-function research.

Such research was the subject of a yearslong debate that had divided the virology community. In 2011, two scientists separately announced that they had genetically altered H5N1, the bird flu virus that has killed at least 456 people since 2003. The scientists gave the virus new functions—enabling it to spread efficiently among ferrets, which are genetically closer to humans than mice—as a way to gauge its risks to people. Both studies had received NIH funding.

Proponents of what became known as gain-of-function research claimed it could help prevent pandemics by highlighting potential threats. Critics argued that creating pathogens that didn't exist in nature ran the risk of unleashing them. Fauci ultimately supported the research, arguing in a coauthored *Washington Post* op-ed that "important information and insights can come from generating a potentially dangerous virus in the laboratory."

In October 2014, the Obama administration imposed a moratorium on new federal funding for research that could make influenza, MERS, or SARS viruses more virulent or transmissible. But loopholes allowed Daszak to try to save the research. On June 8, 2016, he wrote to the NIH's grant specialists that his proposed research was exempt from the moratorium. He also pointed to a 2015 research paper in which scientists had infected humanized mice with the same strains and found that they were less lethal than the original SARS virus.

But the 2015 study he cited was not particularly reassuring. In it, Shi and a preeminent coronavirus researcher at the University of North Carolina, Ralph Baric, mixed components of SARS-like viruses from different species and created a novel chimera that was able to directly infect human cells. (Baric did not respond to written questions seeking comment.)

This gain-of-function experiment, which began before the moratorium, was so fraught that the authors flagged the dangers themselves, writing, "scientific review panels may deem similar studies...too risky to pursue." The paper's acknowledgments cited funding from the NIH and from EcoHealth Alliance, through a different grant.

If anything, the MERS study Daszak proposed was even riskier. So he pitched a compromise to the NIH: If any of the recombined strains showed 10 times greater growth than a natural virus, "we will immediately: i) stop all experiments with the mutant, ii) inform our NIAID Program Officer and the UNC [Institutional Biosafety Committee] of these results and iii) participate in decision making trees to decide appropriate paths forward."

A puzzled NIH program officer wrote to Daszak, "Can you clarify where the work with chimeric viruses will actually be performed?" Daszak acknowledged the mistake, responding, "UNC has no oversight of the chimera work, all of which will be conducted at the Wuhan Institute of Virology."

By July 7, the NIH agreed to Daszak's terms, which relied entirely on mutual transparency: Shi would inform him of any concerning developments involving the lab-constructed viruses, and he would inform the agency. Daszak replied enthusiastically to a program officer, "This is terrific! We are very happy to hear that our Gain of Function research funding pause has been lifted."

Allowing such risky research to go forward at the Wuhan Institute of Virology was "simply crazy, in my opinion," says Jack Nunberg, director of the Montana Biotechnology Center. "Reasons are lack of oversight, lack of regulation" in China. "So that is what really elevates it to the realm of 'No, this shouldn't happen.'"

A subsequent development seemed to support that view. On January 15, 2021, in the waning days of the Trump administration, the State Department released a fact sheet asserting that Chinese military scientists had been collaborating with the WIV's civilian scientists since 2017, if not earlier. That raised the question of whether research there was being repurposed for offensive or military uses. Though Shi and other WIV leaders have previously denied such collaboration occurred, former deputy national security adviser Matthew Pottinger calls those denials "willful lies."

If China's military had been collaborating with WIV scientists, it's unclear if Daszak would have realized it. The work being done there was "always an enigma," a former EcoHealth Alliance staffer told *Vanity Fair*. "He doesn't know what happened in that lab. He cannot know that."

According to Daszak, EcoHealth Alliance "was aware" of the WIV's research activities related to its NIH grant. He says he had no knowledge of Chinese military involvement there and was never notified of any by the U.S. government.

BY 2017, ECOHEALTH Alliance faced a brewing financial crisis. Ninety-one percent of its funding came from the federal government, and 71 percent of that came from the PREDICT grant, according to minutes of the organization's finance committee meeting. The renewed grant, known as PREDICT II, was slated to end in two years. The looming possibility that it would expire without being renewed came to be known internally as the "PREDICT cliff."

One possible way to ward off a looming $8 million shortfall was to use the Defense Department as a federal life raft in a new ocean of grants. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) was seeking proposals for a new program called PREEMPT, which aimed to identify animal pathogens "to preempt their entry into human populations before an outbreak occurs."

For EcoHealth Alliance, the PREEMPT grant seemed like a slam dunk. David Morens, senior adviser to Fauci, said that Daszak was one of the "key players" in understanding that "emerging diseases came from animals...and if you knew where the animals were and what diseases they carried, you could predict hot spots." Others, however, questioned the effectiveness of Daszak's approach. "In 20 years of using" a method of predictive modeling, EcoHealth Alliance "did not predict a single outbreak, epidemic, or pandemic," Maureen Miller told *Vanity Fair*.

LAST SEPTEMBER, EcoHealth Alliance's grant proposal to DARPA was leaked to DRASTIC, a loosely affiliated global group of sleuths—ranging from professional scientists to amateur data enthusiasts—dedicated to investigating the origins of COVID-19. From the 75-page proposal, a striking detail stood out: a plan to examine SARS-like bat coronaviruses for furin cleavage sites and possibly insert new ones that would enable them to infect human cells.

A furin cleavage site is a spot in the surface protein of a virus that can boost

its entry into human cells. SARS-CoV-2, which emerged more than a year after the DARPA grant was submitted, is notable among SARS-like coronaviruses for having a unique furin cleavage site.

Documents obtained by *Vanity Fair* shed new light on the chaotic process surrounding the DARPA proposal, which was cocreated with colleagues including Shi Zhengli at the WIV and Ralph Baric at the University of North Carolina. "Those documents were being written by many, many people," one former EcoHealth Alliance employee recalled.

The grant application proposed to collect bat samples from caves in Yunnan Province, transport them to the Wuhan Institute of Virology, extract and manipulate the viruses they contained, and use them to infect mice with humanized lungs. It would then map high-risk areas for bats harboring dangerous pathogens and treat test caves with substances to reduce the amount of virus they were shedding.

It was a long way from saving manatees from motorboats. By almost any definition, this was gain-of-function research. The federal moratorium had been lifted in January 2017 and replaced with a system that required a safety review by the agency funding the research. EcoHealth Alliance's DARPA proposal asserted that its research would be exempt from this review.

At a staff meeting on March 29, 2018, Daszak expressed dismay at the slapdash and amateur nature of the DARPA submission. It was a "major failure on all accounts," he noted, enumerating a cascade of mistakes, including missed deadlines and errors uploading documents. What was needed, he exhorted his staff, was a "change in culture" as "part of [a] mentaility [sic] to get money," according to the meeting minutes.

Inside DARPA, the grant application was met with immediate skepticism. The contract was "never awarded because of the horrific lack of common sense" it reflected, said a former DARPA official who was there at the time. EcoHealth Alliance, he added, was viewed as a "ragtag group" willing to get on an Air China jet and stay in bad hotels.

Likewise, the WIV was viewed as subpar, especially when compared with the Harbin Veterinary Research Institute, which operated China's only other high-containment laboratory with the highest biosafety protocol: BSL-4. Harbin was China's Harvard, said the former DARPA official. The WIV was more like a safety school.

Though two of three DARPA reviewers deemed it "selectable," the third, a program manager in the Biological Technologies Office, recommended against funding it. He wrote that the application did not adequately mention or assess the gain-of-function risk or the possibility that the proposed work could constitute dual-use research of concern, the technical term for science that can be repurposed to cause harm or endanger security.

The DARPA proposal was "basically a road map to a SARS-CoV-2-like virus," says virologist Simon Wain-Hobson. If the research had the blessing of a top coronavirus scientist like Baric, then it is possible the WIV would have wanted to copy what it viewed as cutting-edge science, he said. "That doesn't mean they did it. But it means it's legitimate to ask the question."

According to Daszak, no one at DARPA expressed any concerns about the proposed research to EcoHealth Alliance. He added, "the research was never done by EHA or, to my knowledge, any of the collaborating partners on that proposal."

IN LATE DECEMBER 2019, cases of what would soon be identified as SARS-CoV-2 began emerging around the Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market in the Jianghan district of Wuhan, roughly eight miles from the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Daszak seemed poised to play a leading role in the emerging crisis. On January 30, 2020, he went on CGTN America, the U.S. outpost for Chinese state television, and said, "We're seeing a small amount of human-to-human transmission in other countries, but it's not uncontrollable." He added that the Chinese government was taking all necessary steps "to be open and transparent."

In fact, the opposite was true. The virus was spreading uncontrollably and the Chinese government was busy crushing anyone who spoke out: It ordered laboratory samples destroyed, punished doctors who raised alarms, and claimed the right to review any scientific research about COVID-19 ahead of publication, a restriction that remains in place today.

At the highest levels of the U.S. government, alarm was growing over the question of where the virus had originated and whether research performed at the WIV, and funded in part by U.S. taxpayers, had played some role in its emergence.

To Robert Redfield, CDC director at the time, it seemed not only possible but likely that the virus had originated in a lab. "I personally felt it wasn't biologically plausible that [SARS-CoV-2] went from bats to humans through an [intermediate] animal and became one of the most infectious viruses to humans," he told *Vanity Fair.* Neither the 2002 SARS virus nor the 2012 MERS virus had transmitted so efficiently from one person to another.

"DASZAK DOESN'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED IN THAT LAB. HE CANNOT KNOW THAT."

What had changed? The difference, Redfield believed, was the gain-of-function research that Shi and Baric had published in 2015, and that EcoHealth Alliance had helped to fund. They had established that it was possible to alter a SARS-like bat coronavirus so that it would infect human cells via a protein called the ACE2 receptor. Although their experiments had taken place in Baric's well-secured laboratory in Chapel Hill, who was to say that the WIV had not continued the research on its own?

In mid-January 2020, Redfield expressed his concerns in separate phone conversations with three scientific leaders: Fauci; Jeremy Farrar, the director of the U.K.'s Wellcome Trust; and Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director general of the World Health Organization. Redfield's message, he says, was simple: "We had to take the lab-leak hypothesis with extreme seriousness."

It is not clear whether Redfield's concerns are what sparked Fauci's own. But

on Saturday night, February 1, at 12:30 a.m., Fauci emailed the NIAID's principal deputy director, Hugh Auchincloss, under the subject line "IMPORTANT." He attached the 2015 paper by Baric and Shi and wrote, "Hugh: It is essential that we speak this AM. Keep your cell phone on." He instructed Auchincloss to read the attached paper and added, "You will have tasks today that must be done."

February 1 proved to be a critical day. With the death count in China passing 300 and cases popping up in more than a dozen countries, Farrar convened a group of 11 top scientists across five time zones. That morning, he asked Fauci to join. "My preference is to keep this group really tight," Farrar wrote. "Obviously ask everyone to treat in total confidence." Fauci, Francis Collins, Kristian Andersen, and Robert Garry all joined the call. No one invited Redfield or even told him it was happening.

In the conference call and emails that followed over the next four days, the scientists parsed the peculiarities of SARS-CoV-2's genomic sequence, paying special attention to the furin cleavage site.

Dr. Michael Farzan, an immunologist, leaned toward the lab-origin hypothesis, telling a member of the group, "I think it becomes a question of...whether you believe in this series of coincidences, what you know of the lab in Wuhan, how much could be in nature—accidental release or natural event? I am 70:30 or 60:40." He was not alone. Garry remarked on the "stunning" composition of the furin cleavage site: "I just can't figure out how this gets accomplished in nature." The previous evening, Andersen had emailed Fauci, saying that he and scientists including Garry, Farzan, and the Australian virologist Edward Holmes all found the genetic sequence "inconsistent with expectations from evolutionary theory."

But within three days, four of the scientists on the call, including Andersen, Garry, and Holmes, had shared the draft of a letter arguing the opposite. Farrar shared a copy with Fauci, who offered feedback ahead of its publication on March 17 in *Nature Medicine.* The letter, The Proximal Origin of SARS-CoV-2, analyzed the genomic sequence and made a seemingly unequivocal statement: "We do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible."

How they arrived at such certainty within four days remains unclear. On February 11, one of its five authors, the Columbia University epidemiologist W. Ian Lipkin, emailed a coauthor saying that a draft of the letter "does not eliminate the possibility of inadvertent release" through routine laboratory work cultivating a virus at the WIV. He added, "Given the scale of the bat CoV research pursued there and the site of emergence of the first human cases we have a nightmare of circumstantial evidence to assess."

ECOHEALTH ALLIANCE'S DARPA PROPOSAL WAS "BASICALLY A ROAD MAP TO A SARS-CoV-2-LIKE VIRUS."

A Wellcome spokesman told *Vanity Fair,* "Dr. Farrar's view is that there was at no stage any political influence or interference." Garry said that it was "frankly tiresome to explain for the umpteenth time that that was one email cherry-picked among dozens, even hundreds, in part of an ongoing scientific discussion."

While Andersen and the others were fine-tuning the proximal origin letter, Daszak was quietly working to bury speculation of a lab leak. On February 19, in a letter published in *The Lancet,* he joined 26 scientists in asserting, "We stand together to strongly condemn conspiracy theories suggesting that COVID-19 does not have a natural origin." Nine months later, emails released by a Freedom of Information group showed that Daszak had orchestrated the *Lancet* statement with the intention of concealing his role and creating the impression of scientific unanimity.

Under the subject line, "No need for you to sign the 'Statement' Ralph!!," he wrote to Baric and another scientist: "you, me and him should not sign this statement, so it has some distance from us and therefore doesn't work in a counterproductive way."

Among the signatories of the *Lancet* statement was Jeremy Farrar. Reading the *Lancet* letter, with Farrar's name attached to it, Redfield had a dawning realization. "They made a decision, almost a P.R. decision, that they were going to push one point of view only" and suppress rigorous debate, said Redfield. "They argued they did it in defense of science, but it was antithetical to science."

A Wellcome spokesperson told *Vanity Fair,* "Dr. Farrar does not believe the [*Lancet*] letter was covertly organized. He had no conflict of interest to declare."

DURING A White House COVID-19 press briefing on April 17, 2020, a reporter for the right-wing television network Newsmax asked President Donald Trump why the NIH would fund a $3.7 million grant to a high-level lab in China. The details were wrong, and the question seemed queued up to feed an anti-China political agenda. Trump responded, "We will end that grant very quickly."

Seven days later, Daszak received a sharply worded letter from a senior NIH official: His bat coronavirus research grant, which had provided subgrants to the WIV, was being terminated. So began a bitter, ongoing battle between Daszak and the NIH over whether he'd complied with the grant's terms.

Daszak also faced increasingly pointed questions about the WIV's decision to take down its online database of 22,000 genomic sequences in September 2019, prior to the known onset of the pandemic. Why would a database supported by U.S. tax dollars to help prevent and respond to a pandemic be made "inaccessible exactly when it was needed to fulfill its intended purpose?" asks Jamie Metzl, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, who was among the first to call for a full investigation of COVID-19's origins.

By October 2021, the NIH had repeatedly demanded that EcoHealth Alliance turn over data related to its grant research with the WIV. Daszak argued that he couldn't share a number of SARS coronavirus sequences because

he was waiting for the Chinese government to authorize their release. The explanation seemed to undercut the entire rationale for having the U.S. government help fund a global collaboration on virus emergence.

Reached for comment, Daszak said it was "incorrect" to suggest that EcoHealth Alliance had not "readily shared data" and asserted that all of its relevant coronavirus data from NIH-supported research at the WIV has now been made public.

U.S. OFFICIALS AND at least one of Daszak's former colleagues were stunned when, in November 2020, the WHO announced the names of 11 international experts assigned to a fact-finding mission to China to investigate COVID-19's origins. China had veto power over the list, and none of the three candidates put forward by the U.S. had made the cut. Instead, Daszak was listed as America's sole representative.

It's still unclear how Daszak wound up on the commission. Daszak told *Vanity Fair,* "WHO reached out to me and asked me to serve on the committee. I initially refused, but...following their persuasive arguments decided that it was my duty as a scientist to support the origins investigation." A WHO spokesperson would neither confirm nor deny Daszak's account.

One former EcoHealth staffer thinks it's obvious who tapped Daszak for the role: "If his name was not among the names floated [by the U.S.], his was the name that the Chinese government chose."

On March 24, 2021, Daszak presented a confidential preview of the WHO mission's findings to a group of federal health and national security officials in a packed government conference room. Dressed in a tweed jacket instead of his usual hiking gear, he clicked through a 36-slide presentation, which *Vanity Fair* obtained.

Amid the charts, graphs, and old photos from the Huanan market of caged animals that could have harbored the virus, there was one slide devoted to the Wuhan Institute of Virology. It seemed to suggest that the questions swirling around the laboratory as a possible source of the pandemic could be put to rest. There had been annual external audits with no unusual findings. Access was strictly controlled. And his trusted partner Shi Zhengli said there had been no COVID-19-like illnesses among her staff.

The WHO commission released its 120-page final report a week later. The experts had voted, by a show of hands, that while transmission through an intermediate animal was likely to very likely, transmission through a laboratory incident was "extremely unlikely."

The report was so error-riddled and unpersuasive that WHO director general Tedros effectively disowned it the day it was released. "As far as WHO is concerned all hypotheses remain on the table," he said.

Daszak himself all but admitted—in a letter to Dr. Michael Lauer, the NIH's deputy director for extramural research—that he had signed on to the WHO mission with a personal and professional agenda: to gather exculpatory information about the WIV, in part to help lift the curtain of suspicion around his grant so it could be reinstated.

He wrote that while he had "acted in good faith" to follow the WHO's directives for the mission, he had also gathered essential information that "specifically addresses" one of the NIH's demands: that he arrange for an outside inspection team to find out if the WIV had SARS-CoV-2 in its possession prior to December 2019. He'd returned with "categorical statements from WIV senior staff" that they did not, he wrote, and had managed to get them included in the WHO final report. Unfortunately for Daszak, the NIH was unmoved. The grant remains suspended today.

"THEY MADE A DECISION, ALMOST A P.R. DECISION, THAT THEY WERE GOING TO PUSH ONE POINT OF VIEW ONLY."

ON FEBRUARY 25, 2022, a day before Worobey, Andersen, Garry, and their 15 coauthors rushed their preprints into the public domain, claiming "dispositive evidence" that SARS-CoV-2 originated from the Huanan market, China's CDC published a preprint of its own that contained new data and pointed to a different conclusion. It revealed that, of the 457 swabs taken from 18 species of animals in the market, none contained any evidence of the virus. Rather, the virus was found in 73 swabs taken from around the market's environment, all linked to human infections. Thus, while the samples proved the market served as an "amplifier" of viral spread, they did not prove the market was the source.

Meanwhile, an analysis published on March 16 in the medical journal *BMJ Global Health,* written by a group of Italian scientists and coauthored by Sergei Pond, cites a growing body of studies indicating that the virus may have been spreading worldwide for weeks, or even months, before the officially recognized start date of December 2019. If true, this would entirely upend the presumption of the market as the genesis of the pandemic.

"There are still a lot of credible questions that have not been answered," says Pond. And with "no overwhelming evidence in either direction," he adds, he is "puzzled as to why it's necessary to push in one direction." (Responding to written questions, Andersen said, "I have no particular stake in the idea that SARS-CoV-2 came from the market and not from virology research. The science speaks for itself and the evidence is clear.")

Simon Wain-Hobson has his own hypothesis for what is taking place: The group of scientists pushing the claim of natural origin, he says, "want to show that virology is not responsible [for causing the pandemic]. That is their agenda." ■

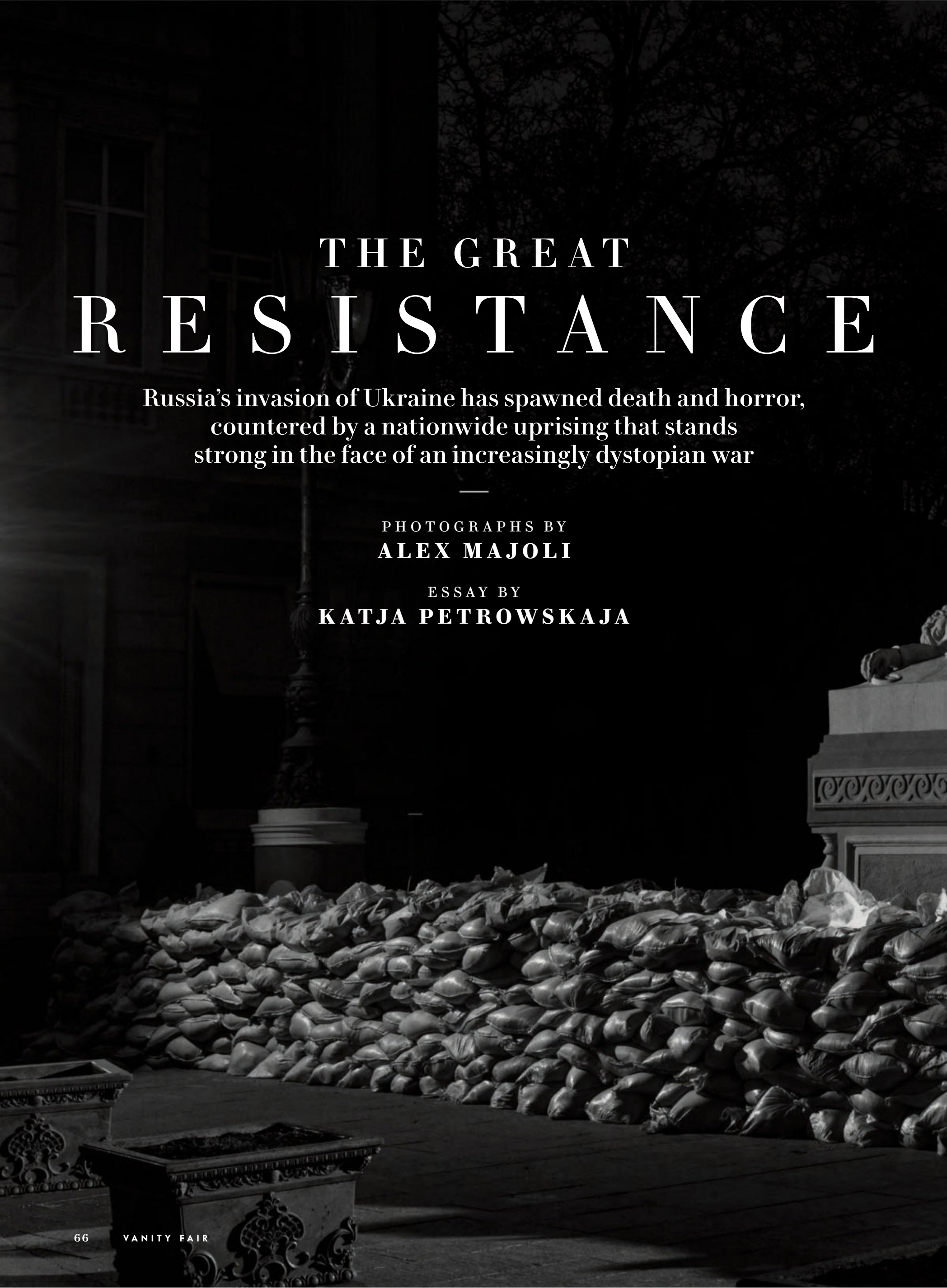
Additional research by Rebecca Aydin and Stan Friedman.

THE GREAT RESISTANCE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has spawned death and horror, countered by a nationwide uprising that stands strong in the face of an increasingly dystopian war

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
ALEX MAJOLI

ESSAY BY
KATJA PETROWSKAJA





STILL STANDING
Fortifications surround Odesa's opera house, an iconic landmark in the Black Sea city, as Russia's bloody war unfolds.

As I write, six weeks have passed since the war began. We are starting to adjust. The death of a person becomes a statistic.

It is impossible to adjust. We are watching the war online. The stories we encounter are emerging as if out of a ripped belly, multifaceted grief, without hierarchy. They block any means of perception. How to bear it? The young woman from Mariupol who was rescuing others, killed; wounded people; huge halls in Poland filled with refugees and their pets; children in Kharkiv living in the subway; the ghost buildings of Odesa; ruins everywhere. My writing cannot protect a single person under the bombs, a single house. The war is quicker than any speech against it.

Today I again woke up at 5:07 a.m. as if from an explosion or an air raid siren. The exact time the war started on February 24. Each time, upon waking, I hope that this war is my personal nightmare. It takes a few seconds for evidence to break through. O. is killed, M. is killed, N. is killed, A. is killed. The skeletons of charred houses hurt me from the inside. I cannot grasp the war, I have to stop it. I am in Berlin, and thousands of people are arriving every day from Ukraine to the main railway station. They don't want to be called refugees. They are homeless, mostly women and children, the men left behind. Their future is uncertain, they are looking for the next step. The family from Mariupol was euphoric, still not believing that they were alive, in Europe, trying to feed me with everything that had just been donated to them. A very old man from a village near Zaporizhzhia held both my hands—his daughter did not want to leave but forced him and her mother to go. A small girl from Kharkiv, jumping around and saying "Papa did this" or "Papa did that," her mother silent. That family from Hostomel—I had promised to help them, a father and his disabled son, but I forgot to come back and lost them in the crowd. Now my mother, a child of World War II, has made it to Berlin. She taught history her whole life. Back in 1941, she, a six-year-old girl, had to leave Kyiv for the Urals, fleeing the German army. Now she has fled Kyiv for Germany, escaping the Russian army. It is perhaps the smallest absurdity of this war.

Whatever I do, my thoughts are in Mariupol, a city that before the war was home to more than 400,000 inhabitants. I try to imagine so many people, starving, under bombs, trying to flee, unable to bury their dead, bombed again, dying while I am writing, dying while Western leaders debate and hesitate. Mariupol already recalls the siege of Leningrad and the battle of Stalingrad in one. We don't dare to imagine the scale of devastation caused by the Russian army. And yet we know enough to say that this army, trained in Grozny and Aleppo, now turns its atrocities on Ukraine, all of them, encyclopedically. A few weeks ago I asked one high-ranking military expert: How many dead civilians does the West need in order to start acting? He said, "It might sound cynical, but we need pictures."

Bucha, Irpin, Vorzel—a trio of small satellites around Kyiv. I saw the pictures at night: a palm and smashed faces peeking out from brown soil, the hand of a dead woman with a professional red manicure. A mass grave. Some 300 bodies. Others lying along the street with tied hands, in fashionable shoes, tortured, shot. The street was newly repaved. Bucha had been getting richer. Lootings. Reports of mass rape, the killing of whole families. My brain refuses to understand, my body goes through withdrawal. I went to Bucha in the summer as a child. In recent years, visiting Kyiv, I joined friends there: My university classmate Taras has a big family in Bucha. They all gather in summer on the lake to make huge pots of plov, to swim and to sing, to stroll through grass taller than we are. Friends of friends, musicians, kids, slightly hippie-like, one of the sweetest gatherings I ever experienced. Danila played bagpipes. I picture them all in my head at once and shiver. Taras wrote the next day. His relatives are out of Bucha, spread across Europe. Safe. The mother of one of my friends in Berlin is also safe after two weeks in a cellar in Bucha, discovering now, in the pace of everyday life, who is and is not alive among her neighbors. The violence is spreading everywhere where people just used to live, further, unpredictable. My friend, a photographer, met a woman in a village on the road to Kyiv. She was watching cars pass by as if she were waiting for something. She had spent her life teaching Russian language and literature. Now she had lost her only son. Russian soldiers had taken a few men to repair their machinery, treated them politely, and then killed them all.

Russia misuses Ukrainian war victims for propaganda in order to kill more people and to indulge further killing, justifying the newly killed as a premise to kill even more. Everything that does not help to break the pace of this war seems hollow to me. We know this dystopian nature of dictatorship. It reproduces death. How many times have we thought about what could have been done to stop Hitler, had one acted in time, had people believed in their own power and the need to resist for the sake of the others. Now we think of this war. It is too late to think in the subjunctive. Accepting our powerlessness, we accept their violence.

From the first days, work became for many a method of resistance to war, became a proof of existence, since the mere idea of sovereign existence is questioned. Not just the Ukrainian army and Territorial Defense Forces—the whole country is working like a beehive. Concrete support for people fighting, for people helping to help—that seems the ultimate choice. Perhaps this is a substitution for hope, to act. No normal life, only frenetic actions. It is not only because horror would swallow you if you were to stop, it is the decentralized initiative of survival. People are creating new supply



MAGNUM PHOTOS.





THE WARPATH
Top: Ukrainians are pitching in to protect their country. Here, young volunteers move anti-tank barrages to the eastern entrance of Odesa in preparation for attacks. Bottom: A Russian missile strike on a military base in Mykolaiv claimed the lives of dozens of Ukrainian soldiers.

systems and information networks, organizing evacuations, cooking for the army, buying medicine and supplying those who remain in occupied zones, rescuing pets and protecting monuments. This irrefutable enthusiasm reminds me of the Spanish Civil War. The chain of deeds in a common endeavor has spread across Europe and beyond, and I am also a part of it. There is no time to tell the stories, to tell others what we all are actually doing. For the first few weeks we lived in a tempo of orders. There are thousands of such groups, emerging sporadically. But there is so much grief that even helping all the time, you cannot heal the wounds. The war lasts and multiplies calamities.

This merciless knowledge inevitably makes witnesses out of us. I wonder, who is this "we"? We Ukrainians? We who live in Europe? Anyone who agrees that Putin has to be defeated by all means? "We" can admire those who are fighting, feel compassion with those who suffer, we, who sometimes experience powerlessness. Others can pretend that this war has nothing to do with them. But the Russian war has already changed the order of things, exposed the vulnerability of the most powerful world organizations. The war could be stopped by a common act of resistance, but so much depends nowadays on how we define this "we," expanding it beyond the institutions and methods that have proven themselves insufficient.

Spring has come and people's wish to return to Ukraine grows even stronger. My mom, my friends, people I met at Berlin's train station, so many want to go home. Even if there is no home left. I could never have expected that our life would once turn as simple as a folk song: to chase away the enemy, to reunite with loved ones, to touch the soil, to enter the apartment, to plant, to mourn, to see the orchards blossoming, to go back to work, to rebuild or just to visit the place you came from—simple, hardly reachable things. ■



FIRING LINE
Volunteers in Odesa receive training in firearms as Russia's full-scale invasion grows.

LAST RITES
Sergii Belogodov, 29, is laid to rest following an attack on the military base of Voznesensk.





SAFE HAVEN
Millions of people, many of them children, have fled Ukraine since Russia invaded, with more displaced inside the country.



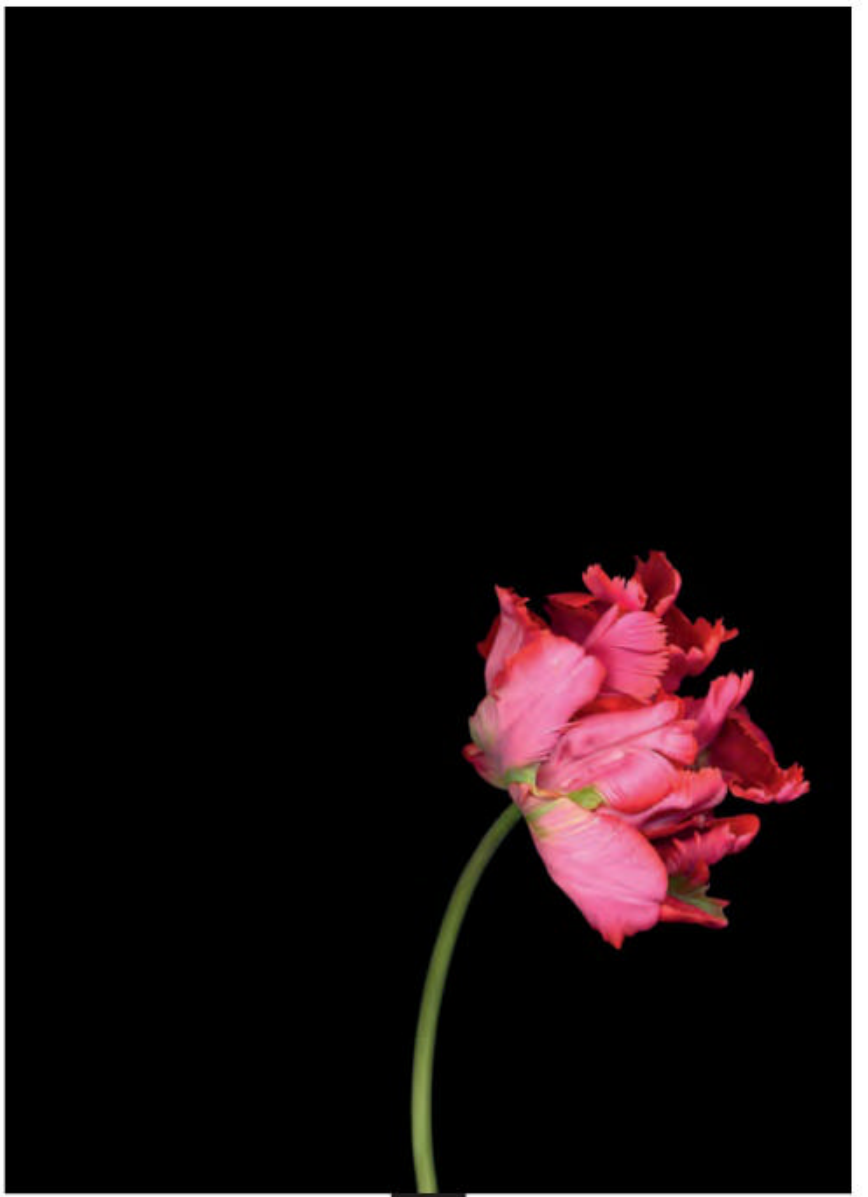


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VANITY FAIR

Awards Insider

A SPECIAL SECTION DEDICATED TO THE TV STARS AND CREATORS WHO KEEP US RIVETED, STREAMING, AND DREAMING

Featuring

SQUID GAME

Photographs by AB+DM

THE RISE OF THE TRAUM-COM *p. 80*

TV GOES BACK TO THE OFFICE *p. 82*

WHAT STREAMERS WANT *p. 90*

EMMY HOPEFULS IN SUMMER STYLE *p. 100*

AFTERNOON TEA WITH MATTHEW MACFADYEN *p. 114*

REUNITED: JENNIFER COOLIDGE & NATASHA LYONNE *p. 120*

RUBIK'S TUBE

The new TV landscape is complicated and often maddening, but the rewards are great

TOO MANY TELEVISION SHOWS on too many devices is a good problem to have. If you don't agree, talk to someone who spent their childhood using a hanger for a TV antenna and a pair of pliers to change channels—all just to watch *Eight Is Enough*. Yes, the streaming age has been overwhelming. And yes, it's been expensive, as we figure out which platforms we need in perpetuity and which we can cancel and resubscribe to whenever there's a new season of their *one* good show. Still, the industry that kept us rapt and informed in lockdown continues to deliver miracles.

This is *Vanity Fair*'s third annual TV issue. We've tried to capture television as we see it right now, and to track its evolution. Recently, there was a legitimate fear that audiences were watching too many different things for widespread conversations. But, as you'll see here, thrilling shows have made a mark. R.O. Kwon dives into the making, and meaning, of global phenom *Squid Game*. Photographer Nick Riley Bentham shoots stars from *The Dropout, Euphoria, Yellowstone,* and more. And Joy Press has tea with Matthew Macfadyen, whose delicious drama, *Succession,* is to pettiness and treachery what *Ted Lasso* is to being super nice.

Not long ago, it wouldn't have been unreasonable to say that the network sitcom was doomed. Young viewers devoured ancient glories like *Friends* and *Seinfeld* on streaming services while new broadcast shows struggled to connect. Now, ABC has scored with *Abbott Elementary,* a gentle comedy about teachers at a Philadelphia school that borrows its winking mockumentary device from past darlings like *The Office* while incorporating the perpetual optimism of Coach Lasso. CBS has watched the steady rise of *Ghosts,* a zany haunted-house comedy closer to the tartness of Liz Lemon than to Leslie Knope's aggressive sunshine. And in a savage irony, some streamers are now imitating network TV after trouncing it in the revolution.

Streamers have even begun dropping episodes of some shows on a weekly basis, like broadcast networks or old-school HBO. Is the all-at-once, binge-happy dump headed for extinction? Probably not. But the weekly model has given shows a real chance to take hold: Showtime's mesmerizing mystery box *Yellowjackets,* for instance, swelled in the zeitgeist after a quiet beginning. You'll find it in these pages, along with dozens of other series that deserve Emmy attention. Some will be favorites of yours, some won't. But there's no denying the scope of what's out there—and, anyway, as you've probably heard, love is blind. ■

Previous page: **Park Hae-soo's** jacket by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello;** shirt by **Gucci;** pants and tie by **Dior Men;** shoes by **T.U.K.;** socks by **Pantherella. Hoyeon's** dress and jewelry by **Louis Vuitton;** boots by **Jimmy Choo. Lee Jung-jae's** clothing and tie by **Gucci;** shoes by **T.U.K.;** socks by **London Sock Company;** ring by **David Yurman.** Hair products by **Kérastase Paris** (Park) and **Oribe** (Hoyeon, Lee). Grooming products by **MAC** (Lee, Park). Hair by Jenny Cho (Hoyeon), Sonia Lee (Lee), Mina Park (Park). Makeup by Sabrina Bedrani. Grooming by Sonia Lee. Tailor, Shana Albery. Produced on location by Ellie Stills. Styled by Deborah Afshani. Photographed exclusively for *V.F.* by AB+DM in Los Angeles. For details, go to VF.com/credits.

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Amy Schumer
Life & Beth

THE RISE OF THE TRAUM-COM

Childhood cancer, alcoholism, humiliation, and death become the stuff of wistful comedy

BY REBECCA FORD

IN ***LIFE & BETH,*** Amy Schumer's almost 40-year-old character, Beth, never takes off her bra, even in the most intimate moments. Soon it's revealed that her hang-up stems from a mortifying teenage memory—one pulled straight from Schumer's life. "It was so humiliating and painful," she tells *Vanity Fair,* "and it just kind of stuck with me."

So much of Hulu's *Life & Beth,* which Schumer created, cowrote, and stars in, is inspired by the actor's own experiences, from teenage cruelty to the strained relationship with her mother and her own battle with the hair-pulling disorder trichotillomania. But the series is also funny, finding laughter in those painful, messy memories. As the landscape of television has opened up over the past few years, confessional shows from the minds of singular creators like Michaela Coel's *I May Destroy You,* Issa Rae's *Insecure,* and Phoebe Waller-Bridge's *Fleabag* have brought personal stories to the screen that feel both unique to the voices that created them and relatable to a wide audience. "That stuff, it's so brutal," says Schumer, "but after writing about it and talking about it and then shooting it—I don't know, it really feels like I've processed it."

Schumer's stand-up has often revealed parts of her past and personal life, as did her 2016 book *The Girl With the Lower Back Tattoo.* But turning her life into fiction with *Life & Beth,* she even felt nervous about what the crew would think, watching former humiliations play out. "That felt kind of vulnerable—just knowing that the thought would pass through their heads of, Oh, she went through this. How true is this?" she says. Then again, she was too busy directing 4 of the 10 episodes to linger much longer on it. "It's not like everybody's thinking about me. Everyone's thinking about lunch and doing a good job or, like, their *own* lives."

VANESSA BAYER, WHO wrote her battle with childhood cancer into her new show, *I Love That for You,* agrees that



Vanessa Bayer
I Love That for You

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RYAN McAMIS



Bridget Everett
Somebody Somewhere

there's "comedy in trauma" and brings that balance of dark and light to the series about a woman who dreams of becoming a Home Shopping Network host. Like Bayer, the character had cancer in her youth and suffers from a bit of arrested development, still trying to figure out how to be a grown-up and have an adult relationship.

The half-hour Showtime comedy, which Bayer cocreated with Jeremy Beiler, sees her character, Joanna, at first attempting to hide her past with cancer from her new coworkers but then using it in order to keep her new dream job. Bayer says the inspiration came from her own experience of going to college and not being known for her cancer anymore. "It was interesting for me to not be treated with the same kid gloves that I had been treated with in high school. And I think there was a part of me, for sure, that missed that," she says. The series features flashbacks to the character's time in the hospital, and Bayer warned her parents that it might hit close to home. "And I also remind them, 'This is not you guys,'" she says.

BRIDGET EVERETT HAD no reservations about sharing real aspects of her past in her series *Somebody Somewhere* but never wanted to do anything to hurt her family. Created by Hannah Bos and Paul Thureen, the HBO show has its roots in Everett's life, set in her hometown of Manhattan, Kansas, and follows an aspiring singer who has left "the big city" after her sister's death from cancer. "I'm number one on the call sheet and an executive producer, so it's my job to give as much of myself as I can," says Everett. "You don't really think about like, Oh, a million people are going to see this."

Everett herself never left city life, but like her character, Sam, she lost her sister and was never able to share her music with her. "It was actually kind of wonderful [making this show] because I've never seen a mental health care professional and probably haven't dealt with her death in the way that I should have," says Everett. "To me, the show is a love letter to her, and it's a love letter to singing and to music."

Simone Finch
Single Drunk Female



TRAUMA HAS LONG been the stuff of drama and melodrama, but these new dispatches feel fresh and surprising because they're deeply rooted in specificity by their creators. Simone Finch, who created *Single Drunk Female* based on her own experiences as an alcoholic trying to get sober, wrote her ex–best friend into her show. In the Freeform series, the main character, Samantha (Sofia Black-D'Elia), is new to recovery and attempting to repair her friendship with Brit (Sasha Compère)—which Finch was never able to do with her real-life friend, whom she hasn't spoken to since 2013. "She never saw me get sober," says Finch. "So writing this was like, what if I had a chance to show Brit that I'm different today than I was then?"

Finch started writing when she was still drinking, but the story really came together after she got sober eight years ago, when she was 28. Over the 10-episode first season, the series charts her highest and lowest moments—including Samantha's struggle with the death of her father, broken relationships, and sloppy nights—out there for the world to see. "It's scary, I'm not going to lie to you," says Finch. "But in AA they say you're as sick as your secrets, and I believe that. I don't have to pretend anymore to be anything else." ■



LOST HORIZON
"There is this sense that it's almost like a play office—like a Playskool office set you'd buy your kids," says *Severance*'s Dan Erickson. "It's this mix of the adult world and a childlike world."

OFFICE SPACE

As more viewers than ever work from home, five new series remind us of what we've been missing beneath the fluorescent lights

BY DAVID CANFIELD



GOVERNMENT WORK
"I chose some really harsh blues and grays, and a lot of high-gloss finishes on the floor to make it feel like Linda has been iced out," says *Impeachment*'s Jamie Walker McCall of the Pentagon set.

IN *IMPEACHMENT: American Crime Story,* the downfall of a presidency begins in a crappy cubicle. After Sarah Paulson's Linda Tripp is pushed out of her longtime White House job to toil at the Pentagon, we watch the woman who'd later expose Monica Lewinsky's illicit affair with President Bill Clinton stew in her bunker-like nine-to-five digs and mull revenge. "It's a severe diminishment for this person," says showrunner Sarah Burgess. Adds the FX series' production designer Jamie Walker McCall: "From the cozy luxury in the White House, she's sent someplace massive and vast, like she's just another number in the system."

From the real-life office-building frenzy of Apple TV+'s *WeCrashed* to more fantastical imaginings, TV shows set in immaculately designed offices reminded work-from-home audiences of what we've been missing.

In Apple TV+'s sci-fi tale *Severance,* a company literally severs employees' office memories so they're effectively different people inside its walls. That



CALL TO ORDER
"The space is so conducive to connections between people," says *Minx*'s Ellen Rapoport. "I liked it feeling aspirational even though it's pornography."

required a "disorienting, claustrophobic" workplace design, says creator Dan Erickson, who gave production designer Jeremy Hindle all the creative freedom he needed. "Everything's slightly fractured, just like *they* all are," says Hindle. "It's beautiful to look at, but it's weird. It's uncomfortable, but it's comfortable—like the whole show."

A sinister beauty also permeates Netflix's *Inventing Anna,* whose aesthetic is "wealthy, VIP, unattainable, high-end New York," according to production designer Henry Dunn. The show is inspired by Jessica Pressler's reporting for *New York* on wannabe socialite Anna Delvey, and it's set largely in a magazine office with a convincingly lived-in vibe. "We [wanted it] to feel like the real thing," says Dunn. Another magazine-set hit, HBO Max's *Minx,* invented a nascent '70s pleasure publication for women. Production designer Jefferson Sage shot and crafted nude covers, which helped unlock the series' DIY look for creator Ellen Rapoport. "The models came in and had a great time," she says. "You realized, maybe there was this nice, ethical, inclusive porn company in the Valley. Maybe not everything in the '70s was gritty and depressing." And maybe every office isn't either. ■

RED ALERT
"Every single desk was personalized with photographs and specific material to whatever that writer was supposed to be working on," says *Inventing Anna*'s Henry Dunn.





HALL OF MIRRORS
Arguably the most literal example of this season's office trend, *WeCrashed*'s re-creation of the rise and fall of WeWork's founders exactingly replicates the shared-office company's lavish headquarters.

SEVERANCE: APPLE. *IMPEACHMENT, AMERICAN CRIME STORY*: TINA THORPE/FX. *MINX*: KATRINA MARCINOWSKI/HBO MAX. *INVENTING ANNA*: DAVID GIESBRECHT/NETFLIX. *WECRASHED*: APPLE.

OVER THE RAINBOW

THE ESSEX SERPENT

Apple TV+

Claire Danes's character, Cora, cuts a handsome and out-of-place figure striding along a river in Essex, England, as she investigates what locals believe is the return of a deadly sea serpent. Cora is mourning (but not really) an abusive husband and trying, at last, to define who she is—so gray, fittingly, is the color of the day.

THE GREAT

Hulu

Nicholas Hoult's deposed czar Peter spends much of the historical comedy's second season on the skids, trying to win back the crown Elle Fanning's Catherine stole from him. But he does it in style, sporting statement pieces like this lustrous fur-trimmed coat—just the thing to combat a rough Russian winter.

THE GOOD FIGHT

Paramount+

Diane Lockhart, the formidable attorney played by Christine Baranski first on *The Good Wife* and now its streaming sequel, knows a thing or two about wearing a power suit—particularly one in a striking burgundy. The gold brooch helps ensure she'll stand out in the courtroom and just about anywhere else.

THE RIGHTEOUS GEMSTONES

HBO

As profane, pathologically insecure Judy Gemstone, Edi Patterson wears this fittingly jewel-toned satin fuchsia gown to her husband BJ's (Tim Baltz) big post-baptism soiree. Not pictured: BJ's ice-pink formal romper, a garment that must be seen to be believed.

THE SEX LIVES OF COLLEGE GIRLS

HBO Max

The sunny shade, high neckline, and strategic cutouts of this formal but fun sheath epitomize Amrit Kaur's aspiring comedy writer Bela: She's bold and sex positive but savvy enough not to show too much skin at a stuffy (and disillusioning) networking event.

WINNING TIME

HBO

In the early 1980s, Magic Johnson's future was as bright as the jerseys the L.A. Lakers wore on the court. Quincy Isaiah sports a perfect replica of that classic uniform in HBO's ebullient dramedy, which chronicles the period in the late 1970s when Jerry Buss (John C. Reilly) bought the franchise—and ushered in the "showtime" era.

THE ESSEX SERPENT: APPLE. *THE GREAT*: GARETH GATRELL/HULU. *THE GOOD FIGHT*: PARAMOUNT+. *THE RIGHTEOUS GEMSTONES*: RYAN GREEN/HBO. *THE SEX LIVES OF COLLEGE GIRLS*: HBO MAX. *WINNING TIME*: WARRICK PAGE/HBO.



Television's more memorable costumes cover the full color spectrum, from a Victorian widow's drab duds to a certain inescapable tracksuit

BY HILLARY BUSIS

QUEENS

ABC

Brandy's Naomi is at the center of a lot of drama on this juicy soap, which casts the breathy diva as a former hip-hop megastar reuniting with her old bandmates. There's just as much spectacle in the foursome's wardrobe, like this center stage–ready metallic coverall. It's just the sort of flash you'd expect from someone who proudly calls herself a Nasty Girl.

SQUID GAME

Netflix

If you own a single streaming-enabled device—or even just happened to wander outside last Halloween—you're intimately familiar with the forest green tracksuits foisted upon the desperate contestants, like Oh Yeong-su's wily Oh Il-nam, who have been roped into this South Korean hit's deadly central competition.

TED LASSO

Apple TV+

Did you know that Jason Sudeikis actually plays two characters on *Ted Lasso*? In the episode pictured here, he introduced Led Tasso, his ultra-nice coach's ultra-not-nice alter ego. But both wear the same cerulean AFC Richmond warm-up jacket and track pants, which can be accessorized with either a grin or a frown. (And a mustache, natch.)

EUPHORIA

HBO

Perhaps the frilly cropped jacket seen here on Sydney Sweeney's Cassie hasn't single-handedly sparked a gingham craze. But it was a key component of season two's most talked about (and memed) scene, in which Cassie's friends devastatingly ask if she's wearing it because she's auditioning for a school production of *Oklahoma!*

THE GILDED AGE

HBO

Purple is a traditionally royal color, which may be why Denée Benton's aspiring writer Peggy embraces it after trading rural Pennsylvania for bustling nouveau riche New York City. The daring hue also nods toward the character's thoroughly modern ambitions.

THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL

Amazon

While the boisterous comedy's third season officially crosses the barrier into 1960, Midge (Rachel Brosnahan) and her cohort are still donning prim '50s fashion. But Midge's demure trappings belie her spicy onstage persona, played up even more this season by her gig as the opening act at a burlesque club.

QUEENS: WILFORD HAREWOOD/ABC. *SQUID GAME*: NOH JUHAN/NETFLIX. *TED LASSO*: APPLE. *EUPHORIA*: EDDY CHEN/HBO. *THE GILDED AGE*: ALISON COHEN ROSA/HBO. *THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL*: PRIME VIDEO.



FUNNY 'CAUSE IT'S TRUE

Late-night writers reveal how they wrote some of their trickiest segments

BY SAVANNAH WALSH





THE AMBER RUFFIN SHOW

(Peacock)

"DON'T SAY GAY"/"LET'S GO BRANDON"

After several years writing for television together—first on *Late Night With Seth Meyers* and now on her own Peacock show—Amber Ruffin calls herself and her head writer, Jenny Hagel, "a two-headed monster." Having two sets of eyeballs on everything might slow other shows down, she says, "but for some reason, the combo of Jenny and Amber just makes it lightning fast."

The duo's skills served them well in addressing the year's wildest stories—from Hagel's personal piece about Florida's discriminatory "Don't Say Gay" bill to Ruffin's takedown of the right wing's "Let's Go Brandon" trend. "I truly thought that was the dumbest thing on earth," Ruffin says of the latter. "It's just a class clown from the back of the room, yelling something a little shitty." Making jokes about heavy topics is what Hagel calls a "late-night dance," but as Ruffin says, "Everyone who is oppressed naturally makes jokes about it as a means of survival."

LATE NIGHT WITH SETH MEYERS

(NBC)

PUTIN'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

During an episode in March, *Late Night* writer Dina Gusovsky made a quip that had some audience members gasping audibly: "Despite the fact that I had been told many times to 'Go back to Russia'—shout-out to my fifth grade teacher—I am so, so grateful to be an American." Gusovsky hadn't anticipated the response. "When you're just so used to people saying certain things to you, you forget that it's not okay," says the writer, a Russian Jewish refugee whose family fled the former Soviet Union 30 years ago. After numerous drafts ("There was a version of the script where it was just three pages of me trolling Seth about going to Ukraine"), Gusovsky presented an impassioned and very personal piece, complete with childhood photos and a nod to her 95-year-old babushka. It was a relief when her story was well received, of course. As she put it in the segment, "To this day, I often feel like a walking contradiction in America."

"Everyone who is oppressed naturally makes jokes about it as a means of survival."

LATE NIGHT WITH SETH MEYERS: LLOYD BISHOP/NBC; *THE AMBER RUFFIN SHOW:* HEIDI GUTMAN/PEACOCK. *THE DAILY SHOW:* MATT WILSON/COMEDY CENTRAL. O'BRIEN: CINDY ORD/GETTY IMAGES.



"There's discourse and communities that I have access to that other people just aren't aware of."

THE DAILY SHOW WITH TREVOR NOAH

(Comedy Central)

KIM, KANYE, AND PETE

How does one wade into the ever-unfolding tabloid-centric saga that is Kim Kardashian, Kanye West, and Pete Davidson? Gingerly, says *The Daily Show* writer Christiana Mbakwe. There was hesitation among the writers about weighing in at all, she says: "Not just because of the tabloid element, but because it also involves children. It can get very complicated and icky quickly." The key, she says, was making a celebrity story feel universal, even though "most women in the world don't have the same resources that Kim Kardashian has." Trevor Noah eventually used a joke that Mbakwe had pitched—"I mean, [Kim] spends half her time helping Black people come out of jail, so now she can't be throwing Kanye West in"—and shared his own childhood experience with domestic abuse. Mbakwe calls the piece the "most impactful" she's been part of on the show.

CONAN

(TBS)

"THE BLACCINE"

The segment began drolly: Conan O'Brien asked comedian Deon Cole why some Black Americans were wary of getting a COVID-19 vaccine, and Cole told him, "The reason is very, very simple. Have you heard of *history*, Conan?"

Skyler Higley, who wrote the piece, wanted to capture the fraught backstory but also advocate for the shot, so he came up with "The Blaccine," in which Cole pitches a shot for Black people. "I didn't want us to be telling Black people, 'You need to get the vaccine,' because that felt very patriarchal and patronizing," he says. Instead, Cole delved into the discrimination people of color have faced in health care, then introduced his proposal for a new vax with "cocoa butter, tea tree oil, ginger ale, Vicks VapoRub, but most importantly, absolutely no white nonsense." (Cole insisted the Blaccine would be "too spicy" for O'Brien himself.)

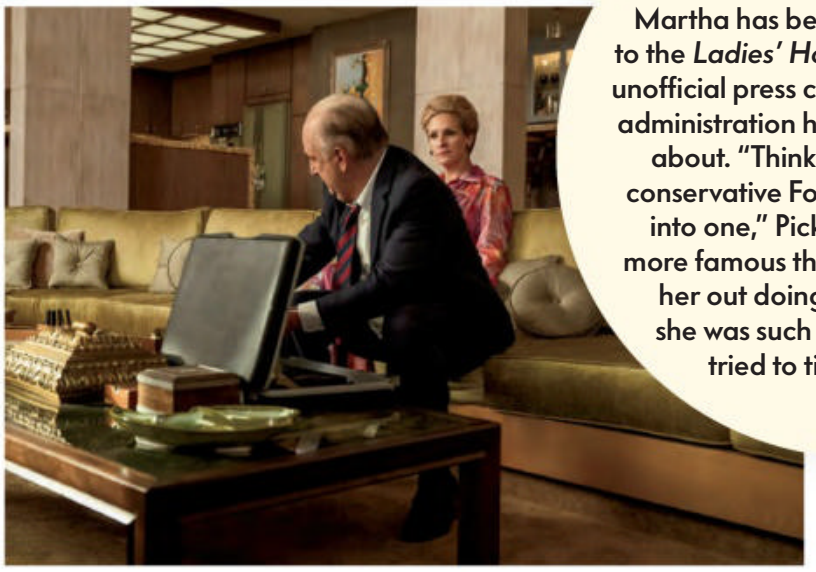
"There's discourse and communities that I'm aware of and have access to that other people just aren't aware of," Higley says. "Even getting the premise across was having to explain, 'Okay, here's why, historically, Black people are hesitant to get the vaccine, and they have very valid reasons.' "





SPOTLIGHT

Capturing Martha's early '70s fame was a challenge that could only be solved through casting. Pickering says of Roberts, "You have this shorthand of a person who has been one of the most famous actresses in the world for 30 years."



HOT MIC

Martha has been giving an interview to the *Ladies' Home Journal*, part of an unofficial press campaign that the Nixon administration has wildly mixed feelings about. "Think of Martha like every conservative Fox News celebrity rolled into one," Pickering says. "She was more famous than Nixon. They wanted her out doing press for them, but she was such a loose cannon they tried to tightly control it."





LOVE CONNECTION

Despite the heavy prosthetics, Penn's rapport with Roberts emerges as the scene turns sexual. "They had wanted to work together for decades," Pickering says of the stars. "You're witnessing real chemistry onscreen between them, and the real warmth that Sean does feel for Julia."

MARTHA, MY DEAR

Sean Penn and Julia Roberts transform into Nixon's attorney general John Mitchell and his media-savvy wife, Martha, in Gaslit, *a new series from Starz that explores the complicated players of the Watergate era*

BY KATEY RICH

THEIR MARRIAGE IS like Watergate," *Gaslit* creator Robbie Pickering says of John and Martha Mitchell, played by Sean Penn and Julia Roberts in his retelling of the Nixon administration scandal. John Mitchell, the president's attorney general, became infamous after Watergate, but even prior to that he and Martha were notorious around Washington as a hurricane of a couple. "Their marriage was fun to watch and fun to be in but also horrible," Pickering says, comparing it to the thrill felt by all the president's men. "Fascism is fucking fun for a while! That's why people do it!"

Gaslit takes a fresh approach to Watergate by focusing on two couples, the second being John and Maureen Dean, played by Dan Stevens and Betty Gilpin. "We're going into the show assuming nobody cares about Watergate, nobody's nostalgic for it," Pickering says. "I designed the show with Watergate as a backdrop showing the trajectory of these two relationships."

This scene from the first episode of *Gaslit* is the audience's introduction to the Mitchells. John has walked in on Martha giving an unauthorized interview that he quickly clocks is an effort to undermine first lady Pat Nixon. Pickering believes that Martha, who eventually spoke out against the Nixon administration, was driven by "a fundamental jealousy of the hold Nixon had on her husband." But the scene also shows the hold she had on John. "You see the side of John Mitchell where he worships his wife *and* he hates her," Pickering says. "It's just such a juicy, funny, sad, tragic, romantic thing." ■

GASLIT: STARZ ENTERTAINMENT. PAPER: GETTY IMAGES.

MARTHA
The Bay of Pigs was a misunderstanding. This is an *encroachment.*

MITCHELL
For fuck's sake.

MARTHA
I had to reorganize everything. The catering. The flowers. All because you can't stand up to your boss's wife.

MITCHELL
At least Pat Nixon knows how to support her husband.

MARTHA
That's not what I heard. Let's just say that if she stopped talking behind my back, she might find a more fruitful use for that mouth of hers.

MITCHELL
Are you seriously implying that the First Lady doesn't blow her husband enough?

MARTHA
What? No. You're disgusting. She wouldn't know where to start.

Mitchell knows that tone. He betrays the barest smile.

MARTHA [CONT'D)
But I do, don't I? Your baby knows right where to start.

MITCHELL
Martha. Stop. I'm really angry this time.

MARTHA
I'm sorry, grumpy bear. What can I do to make it better?

She rubs against him and pouts. Mitchell turns to McCord.

MITCHELL
That's, um, good for today, son. You can stand down now.

WICKED GAMES

The Mitchells' envy of the Nixons is made clear here in this scene. "It's a source of drama between them, which means it's a source of both cruel games and sexual games," Pickering says. "It serves this dual function of being corrosive in their relationship but also fueling it in a way."

ORAL ARGUMENT

"I think that both of the Mitchells had a pretty ruddy sense of humor," Pickering says. "Reading all I have about Martha, I don't doubt that she made jokes about Pat Nixon's lack of proficiency pleasing her husband."

THAT'S ALL, FOLKS

The revelation that Mitchell's bodyguard is still in the room sets the tone for *Gaslit*'s humorous, human-focused view of the past. "I don't want another solemn story about great men and great women of history," Pickering says. "I want something fun that I can relate to, which is tragic and funny and sad."



UP TO THEIR EYEBALLS

Anxious about the crowded marketplace, the streamers are going after network TV's dwindling audience—and it's changing what shows get made

BY JOY PRESS

IT'S APPARENTLY TIME to ask how long the golden age can stay golden. "All those weird little shows that streaming executives used to want to take a risk on a few years ago—it's just not happening anymore," says a writer who specializes in prestige television. "You have to find ways to Trojan-horse that into big blockbuster genre projects that they will greenlight, because if you front-load a pitch with anything that feels too boundary-pushing these days, it's just an automatic no."

Wasn't streaming supposed to be a wild new frontier of no-rules TV? Taboos broken, formats melted and recombined, artists let off the leash?

The reality is more complicated. Since streamers came to dominate the landscape, the assumption has been that broadcast TV is seriously endangered—that it's struggling to reach new generations of viewers, partly because of its risk-averse rules and its devotion to broad, inoffensive content. That existential threat is real. But some see a worrisome irony emerging: The streamers are acting more and more like the cautious industry they revolutionized. Streamers are pursuing what they call "elevated broadcast," making sitcoms, dramas, procedurals, and reality TV central to their platforms. Some also appear to be pulling back from the challenging content that attracted audiences in hopes of scooping up every viewer the networks have left.

Insiders say streaming executives are becoming less adventurous—or *more* populist, depending on your point of view—because they're spooked by the overcrowded market and uncertain about how to keep expanding (and retaining) their subscriber bases. Recently, Netflix's stock price plunged after an earnings report projected a loss of 2 million global subscribers by June. A top executive there also said that they are exploring a lower-priced subscription that would include commercials. "I'm always a little bit worried that half the streamers will go away at a certain point," says Alan Yang, cocreator of unconventional comedies like Netflix's

ILLUSTRATIONS BY DEREK ABELLA

Master of None, Amazon's *Forever,* and Apple TV+'s upcoming *Loot.* "Can the market sustain all of them spending the way they are and making the number of shows that they make?"

Netflix now abounds in escapist fare à la *Emily in Paris* and *Love Is Blind*. Amazon, famously the home of *Transparent* and *Fleabag,* dedicates an immense amount of money to epics like *The Wheel of Time* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power.* Paramount+ is building a universe around Taylor Sheridan, creator of the Western megahit *Yellowstone.* And Peacock is betting on pop culture reboots to reel in both the nostalgic older audience and younger viewers who respond to tried-and-true templates. "I hear this panic around the idea that some of these streamers are not going to exist in three years, and people get very conservative when that happens," says a showrunner. "There's a real directive to agents and writers to 'broaden the appeal,' which is crazily disheartening."

THE STREAMING INDUSTRY pumps a staggering amount of content into our homes, including series in many languages, because the platforms have executives around the world commissioning shows designed to appeal to local audiences. So the concern is not that a drought of edgy, challenging content will arrive tomorrow. It's more that the age of audacious streaming shows may be winding down.

"Are we not still in that golden moment? Is that over *already*?" says Netflix's global head of TV Bela Bajaria, smiling broadly. "I don't believe streaming is becoming network. We just have so many different kinds of shows that can be in so many different tones and formats. I look at shows on our slate that were really bold and distinct, like *The Queen's Gambit, Maid, Squid Game.* Those things really resonated with an audience too." Bajaria spent much of her career at CBS and Universal Studios, creating network (and later streaming) shows and championing series like *The Mindy Project* and *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* that drew outside conventional lines. She acknowledges that there's a place on the streamer for shows that want to bring absolutely everyone into the tent and points to the postapocalyptic fantasy series *Sweet Tooth* as an example: "I agree that elevated broadcast is a thing."

One industry insider says that Shonda Rhimes's *Bridgerton* was a particular game changer. "I know that there's a real push at Netflix to make other shows into that elevated broadcast sensibility because of its success," says the source. Once the crown jewel of ABC, Rhimes knows how to create seductive, boundary-pushing hits. But she jumped at the chance to experiment with the costume-drama genre inside the streaming format. "What was cool that we could do on Netflix is tell a closed-ended tale: *Here's this season. Here's a fully formed romance,*" Rhimes told *V.F.* last year. "[On network] you have to take that romance and stretch it out for as many seasons as you possibly can and keep coming up with reasons why they're having a new conflict."

Network shows also have a fixed number of episodes per season, and episodes have a set number of minutes. Potential series are tested via pilot episodes. Shows are designed around advertising breaks and are expected to be widely appealing and uncontroversial. The word *vajayjay* became popularized after it was used in Rhimes's own *Grey's Anatomy* in order to get around ABC's standards-and-practices executives, who wouldn't let a fictional doctor say *vagina.*

CREATING A HIT network series once represented the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow for creatives working in television, with their giant syndication deals that could set you up for life. Everybody dreamed of making the next *Friends* or *Modern Family.* And now? "There's still a lot of money to be made in broadcast," one insider says. "But the majority of creators don't want to be working there if they don't have to." An executive producer recently hesitated to take a network gig: "I felt it would actually be damaging to my career if I had this credit on my résumé—especially because I've spent the last few years not doing that so I could have streaming credits." Another showrunner talked about the extra income from network shows (which usually have more episodes than streaming shows) as a "distaste bonus."

Young viewers do still watch network shows—not just classics like *The Office* but new breakout hits like ABC's *Abbott Elementary*—except that they're often watching them on streaming platforms. "I have a soul-crushing example of that," says an exec named George Cheeks. His teenage nephew recently told him that his new favorite show was a comedy called *Ghosts,* about a young couple who inherit a haunted house. Cheeks pointed out that it was on CBS, to which his nephew replied, "What's CBS?" Cheeks bursts out laughing as he recalls the conversation. "I am the *CEO of CBS*!" he says. "But he's only seen it in streaming and had no idea that it actually existed on a broadcast network."

The big four broadcast networks all have streamers of their own now, which allows them to capture more youthful viewers. Cheeks, who also oversees Paramount+, says the average age of people watching *Survivor* on CBS is 60—and 37 for those streaming it on Paramount+. He sees this as a good thing, saying, "We are reaching that unduplicated younger audience in streaming."

If broadcast viewers are quickly approaching retirement, though, why don't networks just focus all their energies on their streamers? Prepare to be shocked: *money.* A 30-second spot run during a popular broadcast show can still bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars. The economics of streaming are trickier, with the constant risk that subscribers will binge a favorite show and then cancel. So media companies are determined to wring every last drop out of broadcast, even as ratings continue to shrink. "What was 25 million viewers became 18 million viewers, which is now, like, 7 million viewers," says a showrunner, "but [networks] don't change the model, because they're afraid to alienate the people that they have."

Whatever they say about network

TV, though, streaming executives are now devoted to replicating its successes because they feel a pressure to be all things to all people—to be superstores of programming. So Netflix has created (extremely popular) competition shows. Hulu has scooped up the Kardashians. And Amazon—immediately upon buying James Bond's parent company, MGM—greenlighted a global competition called *007's Road to a Million*. There are sure to be more developments like this, since unscripted fare costs less than premium drama. "There's a high level of audience engagement in the elimination shows," says Channing Dungey, the chairwoman and CEO of Warner Bros. Television Studios. "So if some shows that promote engagement can be made at unscripted dollar prices, you're doing really well." Even live TV has come to the streamers. "Live has been a big part of our streaming strategy, whether it's sporting events that we have on ESPN+ or the live-TV service that we have as part of Hulu," says Disney streaming president Michael Paull. Disney+ hosted its first livestreamed event in February: the 94th Academy Awards nominations.

Increasingly, streamers are even rethinking one of their most lifestyle-altering inventions: the binge. Instead of dropping an entire series all at once, they're rationing out episodes weekly as in days of yore, so that viewers have time to digest—and buzz about—each one. One television writer says his teenagers didn't even understand the concept of appointment TV until the addictive *Euphoria* began streaming on HBO Max; now they watch it live en masse.

THE NOTION THAT streamers are seeking elevated broadcast makes Susan Rovner chuckle. She's the chair of entertainment content for NBCUniversal television and streaming, overseeing NBC's broadcast network, cable channels, and its two-year-old streaming service, Peacock. "I love hearing that," she says. "Definitely that applies to Peacock."

Rovner—along with Frances Berwick, NBCUniversal chairwoman of



entertainment networks—is in charge of NBCUniversal's whole television landscape, so she can find a home for a variety of content. "There are some shows that are smaller and a bit more niche that we're really proud of and we absolutely love, but we are definitely taking some big swings on shows with that broad appeal," she says, name-checking *Bel-Air,* Peacock's reboot of *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air.* On the other hand, *Joe vs. Carole* (a scripted take on the duo made infamous by the Netflix docuseries *Tiger King*) was initially supposed to be shared between NBC, USA, and Peacock. "As we got into the development of the story," says Rovner, "it was very clear the content would be watered down if it stayed on NBC."

The network-streamer relationship is similarly symbiotic for Craig Erwich, who oversees both Hulu and ABC's broadcast programming. Shows like *The Rookie* and *The Good Doctor* air on ABC's broadcast schedule, and then hours later they're available on Hulu: "So right off the bat, we have elevated broadcast television on Hulu." That leaves room for more niche programming made expressly for the streamers—"shows that have a very dedicated fan base, that don't have to be for everybody," like the irreverent, auteurish *Ramy.* Hulu also has the benefit of streaming content from FX, the high-end cable network behind *Atlanta* and *Better Things.*

It would be a savage irony if streaming, so long a haven for surprising and sometimes disturbing visions, evolved into a younger version of the networks. This scenario is still a ways off, to be clear. Amazon's *Small Axe,* Apple TV+'s *Severance,* and HBO Max's *Station Eleven* would all be unimaginable on a conventional network. But can platforms under financial pressure in an increasingly competitive marketplace continue to support this kind of work? Or will only a small number of privileged creators with overall deals be allowed to make work that doesn't slot into the four-quadrant formula? Dungey points to HBO's *Euphoria* as proof that there's room for dark, edgy material on TV, but says she does see a shift at Netflix, where she was previously an executive. "They came out of the gate really looking to sort of zig where everybody else was zagging, and I think that they have been moving a little bit more toward the mainstream in some of their choices."

Netflix, which relies heavily on mysterious internal metrics, has upset some fans and showrunners by unceremoniously canceling some unorthodox shows. Rachel Shukert's critically beloved series about preteen girls, *The Baby-Sitters Club,* was canned after two seasons. Recently, Shukert told Vulture that when she started working at Netflix in 2016 on the series *Glow,* "it was okay to have a smaller audience and be quirkier or more particular." The philosophy was to support talented creators and trust their projects will find an audience. "As they've grown, I think that philosophy has changed somewhat.... Something that was fine three months ago is suddenly not what they need."

Here's hoping there remains a place for everything under the sun, especially now that we've all had a glimpse of what's possible. "[Streamers] did make a lot of stuff that no one was watching, but it was beautiful," says *Master of None*'s Alan Yang. He pauses thoughtfully. "I say that in the past tense, because the winds might be changing. Ultimately, the executives need eyeballs on their stuff." ■

Additional reporting by Chris Murphy

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It's All in the GAME

SQUID GAME turned rage and desperation into a global phenomenon. The director and stars talk about the show that almost nobody wanted to make—and the early plans for an equally wild second season

By R.O. KWON

Photographs by
AB+DM

Styled by
DEBORAH AFSHANI



FLIGHT OF FANCY
Hoyeon, photographed for *V.F.* in Los Angeles in February, plays the desperate defector Sae-byeok.

Coat by **Fendi;** shoes by **T.U.K.;** socks by **Wolford.**



THE GAMBLER
Lee Jung-jae's journey as Gi-hun begins with a disastrous trip to the racetrack.

Coat and pants by **Alexander McQueen;** shirt by **Gucci;** boots by **Saint Laurent by Anthony Vaccarello;** ring by **David Yurman.**

THEY TOLD HIM no one would watch. In 2009, director Hwang Dong-hyuk tried writing what would become *Squid Game* as a feature film. It was a time of global financial crisis. Hwang himself was in debt, as were his mother and grandmother. But for all his efforts, he couldn't secure financing for a movie about hundreds of desperate individuals competing to the death in children's games for a large cash prize. "People were telling me that it's too unrealistic," Hwang says. It was too absurd, they said—and far too violent—so he put his script away. A decade passed, during which Hwang directed three acclaimed films: *The Crucible, Miss Granny,* and *The Fortress.* But he didn't forget *Squid Game,* and in 2018, he found himself revisiting the old script. "It was a very strange experience," he says, "because what seemed so unrealistic at the time didn't feel as unrealistic anymore."

By then, inequality was rising worldwide, a hate-propagating former reality show host had become president of the U.S., and Hwang's story of disastrously indebted Korean residents vying for $38 million in an elaborate, ruthless game orchestrated by plutocrats no longer sounded so far-fetched. Hwang showed the script to Netflix, which had recently opened a division in Asia, and they agreed. It was an astute bet. The film was expanded into a series, and within 10 days of its release, the Korean television drama was the most watched Netflix show in 90 countries. In nations as different as the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia, people have competed in large-scale, real-life versions of *Squid Game*—without the part about fighting to the death. And the highly violent dystopian thriller isn't just a commercial hit. *Squid Game* is the first series in a language other than English to receive Screen Actors Guild Awards, including for two of the central stars, Lee Jung-jae and Hoyeon.

I've often joked that I turn to Korean shows and films when I'm trying to feel less dead inside, except that it might not be much of a joke: It could just be that I'm reviving myself with potent medicine I require. When I watch Korean productions, I am more likely to weep, yell, rejoice, mourn, and laugh. But even for a Korean drama, *Squid Game* is shot through with high emotion. I watched the nine-episode series over the course of 24 hours, pausing only for pesky tasks like work and sleep. I forgot to eat. At times, I forgot to breathe.

Emotional upheaval has always been central to Hwang's vision. The series begins with its protagonist, Gi-hun, heading to a horse track to place some bets, and what ensues is a sequence of ill-considered decisions and heart-gripping crises. (Spoilers ahead if you haven't seen the first season.) Hwang is fascinated by the idea of gambling, because when people gamble, their façades fall away and they're left with "very pure emotions, whether it be despair, anger, or joy." He knows the series is "at a very extreme end of the spectrum" when it comes to showcasing raw feelings. That's precisely what he wanted to explore.

Almost everybody recruited for the bloody, terrifying arenas of *Squid Game* elects to compete for the cash because they're desperate. The three main characters, for instance, are in utter distress: There's Gi-hun, the obsessive gambler and former autoworker, who's heavily in debt and unable to pay for the urgent medical care his mother needs. There's his childhood best friend, the ambitious Sang-woo, who stole money from clients, invested it, then lost it and is now on the run from the law. And there's Sae-byeok, a North Korean defector who needs money to reunite with her family.

Hoyeon, the model and actor who plays Sae-byeok, won that SAG Award for what is, remarkably, her first acting role. She tells me that Hwang focused on the smallest nuances of her performance, even down to the level of individual syllables in the dialogue. The director would often give revised scripts to the cast the day before shooting. He'd apologize for the timing—and quantity—of his changes, but Hoyeon says the actors were grateful to him: "It was proof that the director was really just incessantly wrestling with the best way to portray these characters." Asked for an example of a key last-minute

IN A TIME OF EXTENSIVE PRIVATION, INEQUITY, DISEASE, FEAR, AND DISTRESS IN SOUTH KOREA AND ELSEWHERE, THE SHOW'S DYSTOPIAN PREMISE FEELS ALARMINGLY PLAUSIBLE.

change, Park Hae-soo, who plays the embezzling, treacherous Sang-woo, remembers a pivotal moment when, as his character is dying, he stretches his hand toward his former best friend, Gi-hun. "That wasn't in the script," says Park. "It was a late adjustment, and I believe the director made that change because he wanted the character to show a glimpse of something human inside himself."

Lee, who plays the gambling addict Gi-hun, says the cast and crew developed a great deal of trust in one another: "It was a very special group of people to work with. And I say that as someone who has been on many, many sets before." (Lee has been one of the most celebrated actors in Korea for 30 years, and his SAG Award is the latest in a long string of honors.) "Yeah, and I think another key to our teamwork would be drinking together a lot," Hoyeon adds, laughing. Lee has said that Gi-hun might be the most difficult role he's inhabited. The character is complicated and ever-shifting. He starts out as a kind of "fool," as director Hwang puts it. In time, he changes, but Lee says that an abiding and essential part of Gi-hun's character is his anger at injustice. The actor thought in depth about how to portray that "over and over" with different levels of rage, as Gi-hun is provoked by a variety of atrocities.

RAGE HAS likely helped *Squid Game* resonate worldwide. South Korea's cumulative household debt, more than $1.5 trillion, now exceeds the country's annual economic output, and the burden falls more on some people than others. In a time of extensive privation, inequity, disease, fear, and distress, the show's dystopian premise feels alarmingly plausible. Not long after the release of the series, when 80,000 union workers in South Korea went on strike, many protested in *Squid Game* costumes and masks.

Hwang's work has sparked social change before. Outrage over the abuses illuminated in his 2011 movie, *The Crucible,* eventually led to the National Assembly of South Korea abolishing a statute of limitations for sex crimes against minors and the disabled. That said, some Koreans have raised concerns about the portrayal of women in *Squid Game,* with a feminist group, Haeil, calling for a boycott of the series for its "exclusively male gaze." (South Korea has the largest gender wage gap among rich countries and often ranks low on gender equality indices. There's also a prevalent antifeminist backlash, and women associated with feminism frequently have to contend with intense harassment.) Hwang believes it's to the good that "people are discussing these issues and having a lot of conversations."

The director didn't start making films because he wanted to speak up about social issues, he says. His love of cinema actually inspired his interest in injustice. "My first focus is to create work that's really going to provide its audience with an immersive experience, a very entertaining experience," he says. Still, he wants to leave viewers mulling over ideas and issues. When working on a big-budget commercial project, Hwang considers it his responsibility to make sure his work will be profitable for investors while bringing "joy to the biggest audience possible."

These might be the words that come up most frequently in talking with the director and cast: *responsibility* and *joy.* I ask them if they feel added pressure about depicting, and perhaps representing, Koreans to so many people. As a Korean American novelist, I am often afraid that I will somehow let us down with what I write. It can be so inhibiting, I tell them, that I have to try to push it behind me. "I think that's a source of constant, significant stress," says Hwang. "I have become this person who, whether I want it or not, represents Korea with whatever I do." Both he and Park feel this in their personal lives as well. Hwang notes that in Korea, public figures are held to "very, very high moral standards."

Since *Squid Game* was her first acting role, Hoyeon's life might have been affected the most. She had been a prominent model but is now "constantly getting recognized on the streets" and has rapidly become one of the most followed South Korean actors on social media. (During one of our video-call conversations, she exclaims about the cookie and card her L.A. hotel has left in her room. The latter is printed with the *Squid Game* logo, and she holds it up with delight.) Hoyeon does feel an increased pressure but considers it constructive: "Because honestly, how can one individual represent an entire culture, right?" CONTINUED ON PAGE 126

HAIR, JENNY CHO (HOYEON), SONIA LEE (LEE), MINA PARK (PARK); MAKEUP, SABRINA BEDRANI; GROOMING, SONIA LEE; TAILOR, SHANA ALBERY. PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY ELLIE STILLS. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS.

ASKED IF THE SECOND SEASON OF* SQUID GAME *WILL HAVE THE SAME THEMATIC PREOCCUPATIONS, HWANG SAYS, "I WANT TO ASK THE QUESTION, 'IS TRUE SOLIDARITY BETWEEN HUMANS POSSIBLE?' "



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT
Park Hae-soo plays the embezzler Sang-woo, who stole money from his clients, then lost it.

Coat by **Casablanca;** shirt by **Kenzo;** pants by **Ernest W. Baker.** Throughout: hair products by **Kérastase Paris** (Park), **Oribe** (Hoyeon, Lee); grooming products by **MAC** (Lee, Park).

JARED LETO & ANNE HATHAWAY

WECRASHED

Apple TV+

Leto's clothing and boots by **Gucci.** Hathaway's dress by **Sportmax;** sandals by **Aquazzura;** jewelry by **Bulgari High Jewelry.**

THE LIFE



This *Emmy* season abounds with star turns by movie legends and fresh talent alike. *V.F.* lets loose with some of our favorites

Photographs by
NICK RILEY BENTHAM

Styled by
NICOLE CHAPOTEAU

of the PARTY



BRIAN TYREE HENRY

ATLANTA

FX

Clothing by **Homme Plissé Issey Miyake;** necklace (top) by **Mikimoto x Comme des Garçons;** watch by **Cartier.**

MACKENZIE DAVIS & HIMESH PATEL

STATION ELEVEN

HBO Max

Davis's gown by **Oscar de la Renta;** necklace by **Bulgari High Jewelry.** Patel's clothing by **Bottega Veneta;** shoes by **Dior Men;** necklace by **Tiffany & Co.**





STEVE MARTIN, SELENA GOMEZ, & MARTIN SHORT

ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING

Hulu

Martin's tuxedo jacket by **Ralph Lauren Purple Label;** shirt and tuxedo pants by **Richard James;** shoes by **Roger Vivier;** bow tie by **Dolce & Gabbana;** socks by **Pantherella;** cuff links by **Cartier.** Gomez's dress by **Alejandra Alonso Rojas;** earrings and bracelet by **Cartier.** Short's tuxedo by **Emporio Armani;** shirt by **Giorgio Armani;** shoes by **Giuseppe Zanotti;** bow tie by **Tie Bar;** socks by **Pantherella.** Additional sandals by **Versace.**



MELANIE LYNSKEY, TAWNY CYPRESS, & JULIETTE LEWIS

YELLOWJACKETS

Showtime

Lynskey's suit by **Lapointe;** sandals by **Larroudé;** necklace by **Tiffany & Co.** Cypress's clothing by **Michael Kors Collection;** shoes by **Jimmy Choo.** Lewis's dress by **Rodarte;** sandals by **Aquazzura;** earrings by **Chopard High Jewelry.**

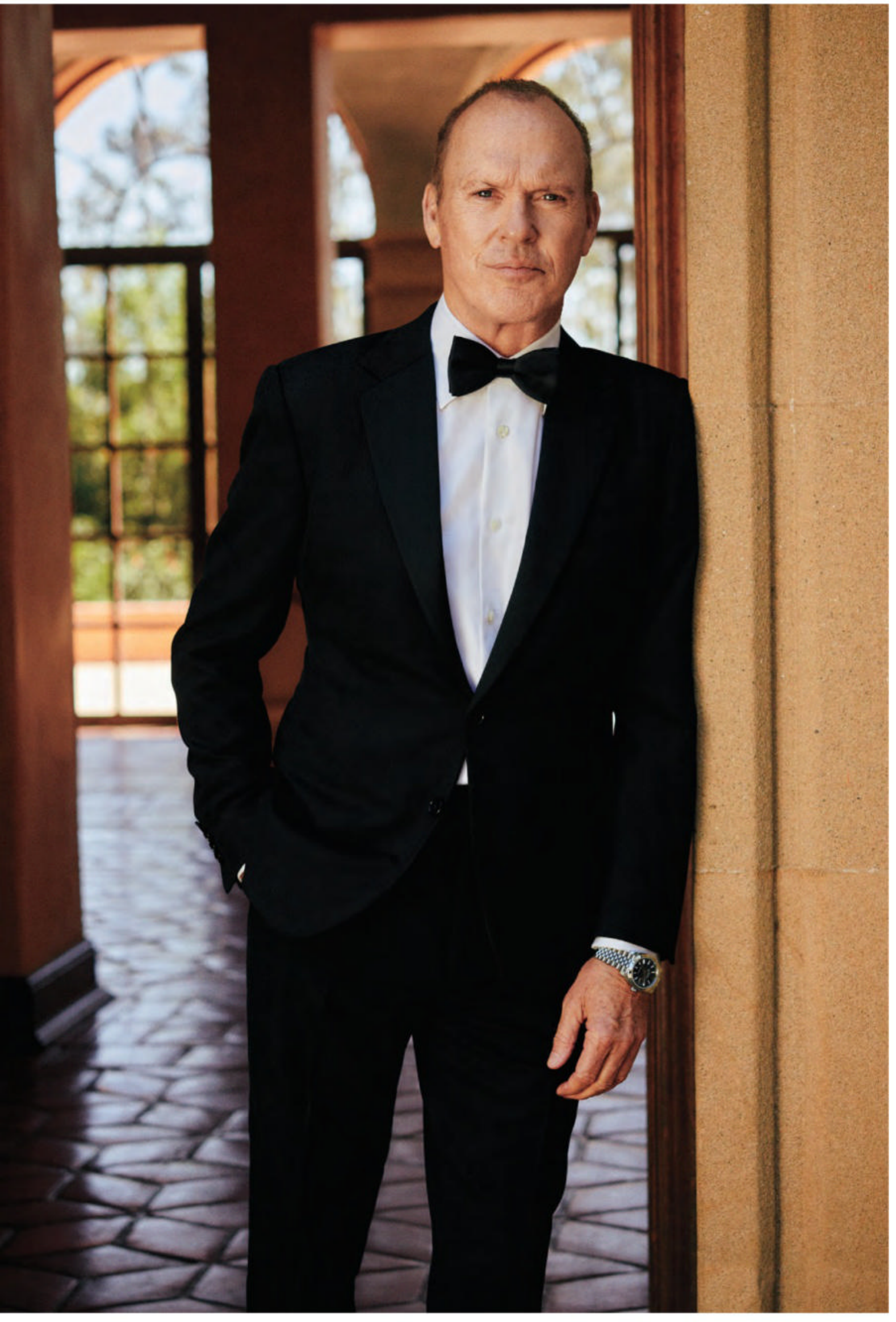
AMANDA SEYFRIED

THE DROPOUT

Hulu

Dress by **Valentino Haute Couture;** ring (right hand) by **Mateo.**





MICHAEL KEATON

DOPESICK

Hulu

Clothing and bow tie by **Ralph Lauren;** watch by **Rolex.**

LILY JAMES

PAM & TOMMY

Hulu

Gown and shoes by **Gucci;** earrings by **Ana Khouri.**





JAYME LAWSON

THE FIRST LADY

Showtime

HANNAH EINBINDER

HACKS

HBO Max

ANGUS CLOUD

EUPHORIA

HBO



Lawson's dress by **Bottega Veneta;** jewelry by **Cartier High Jewelry.** Einbinder's suit by **Alexandre Vauthier Haute Couture;** necklace by **Tiffany & Co.** Cloud's clothing by **Ami Paris.** Kim's dress by **Chanel;** ear piece by **Ana Khouri;** bracelet by **Chanel High Jewelry.** Benton's dress by **Alexandre Vauthier;** ear cuff (right ear) by **Repossi High Jewelry;** earring by **Anita Ko.** Alwyn's clothing by **Brunello Cucinelli;** shoes by **John Lobb;** socks by **Pantherella;** brooches by **Tiffany & Co. Schlumberger** (top) and **Tiffany & Co.**

MINHA KIM

PACHINKO

APPLE TV+

DENÉE BENTON

THE GILDED AGE

HBO

JOE ALWYN

CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS

Hulu



QUINTA BRUNSON

ABBOTT ELEMENTARY

ABC

Dress by **Elie Saab;** earrings by **Mateo;** ring by **Tiffany & Co.**

KEVIN COSTNER

YELLOWSTONE

Paramount Network

Shirt by **Brioni;** pants by **Zegna;** sunglasses by **Oliver Peoples;** watch by **Omega.**

HAIR PRODUCTS BY BO STEGALL THE COLLECTION (MARTIN, SHORT), HOUSE OF SKUFF (ALWYN, CLOUD, PATEL), IGK (JAMES), ORLANDO PITA PLAY (GOMEZ, HATHAWAY), REDKEN (LETO), SHEAMOISTURE (HENRY), STARRING BY TED GIBSON (ALL OTHER WOMEN EXCEPT SEYFRIED). MAKEUP PRODUCTS BY CLINIQUE (LEWIS), GIORGIO ARMANI BEAUTY (HATHAWAY), LANCÔME (SEYFRIED), RARE BEAUTY (GOMEZ), TOM FORD (BENTON, BRUNSON, JAMES), DIOR (ALL OTHER WOMEN). NAIL ENAMEL BY DIOR VERNIS (GOMEZ), OPI (HATHAWAY), CHANEL LE VERNIS (ALL OTHER WOMEN EXCEPT SEYFRIED). GROOMING PRODUCTS BY AUGUSTINUS BADER (LETO), BOY DE CHANEL (HENRY), DIOR (ALWYN), GLOSSIER (PATEL), LA MER (KEATON), LIMELIFE BY ALCONE (MARTIN, SHORT), TATCHA (CLOUD).

SET DESIGN, ANTHONY ASARO. HAIR, RENATO CAMPORA (SEYFRIED), DANILO (JAMES), SHINYA NAKAGAWA (LETO), ORLANDO PITA (GOMEZ, HATHAWAY), TED GIBSON (ALL OTHER WOMEN). MAKEUP, RACHEL GOODWIN (LEWIS), MOLLY GREENWALD (DAVIS, EINBINDER, LYNSKEY), GENEVIEVE HERR (SEYFRIED), SHANNON PEZZETTA (LAWSON), ROBERT RUMSEY (CYPRESS, KIM), MOLLY R. STERN (HATHAWAY), FIONA STILES (BENTON, BRUNSON, JAMES), HUNG VANNGO (GOMEZ). MANICURES, KAYO HIGUCHI-CROWELL (GOMEZ), MARIA SALANDRA (HATHAWAY), ALEX JACHNO (ALL OTHER WOMEN). GROOMING, KAT ARAGON (MARTIN, SHORT), MARISSA MACHADO (KEATON), FRANCISCO PEREZ (COSTNER), KATHY SANTIAGO (HENRY), JAMIE TAYLOR (LETO), MIRA CHAI HYDE (ALL OTHER MEN). TAILORS, MARIA DEL GRECO (GOMEZ, MARTIN, SHORT), OLGA DUDNIK (HATHAWAY, LETO), SUSIE KOURINIAN (ALL OTHERS). PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY PREISS CREATIVE. LOCATION: PEBBLE BAR, NYC (HATHAWAY AND LETO). L.A. LOCATION PROVIDED BY IMAGE LOCATIONS.

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TOM

Matthew Macfadyen's turn as the unctuous, volatile Tom Wambsgans is one of **SUCCESSION**'s unalloyed pleasures. In a cozy bar in Birmingham, England, we talk to the actor about a brilliant career spent evading the spotlight

By JOY PRESS

TOM

Club

Photographs by
ERIK TANNER



ONE OF MATTHEW Macfadyen's earliest roles was in a school nativity pageant, when he played Caspar, one of the three kings bearing gold, frankincense, and myrrh. He was delighted by the part. "I didn't have the terrible pressure of Joseph or Jesus. It was just: The king arrives with his buddies and gets off again," Macfadyen says, sitting in a hotel bar in Birmingham, England. "I was much happier at school being the mayor of Hamelin than the pied piper. And that's probably still true."

Macfadyen is a reluctant star who's been hiding in plain sight for decades. It's not that this most British of British actors has never played a lead role—he starred as the dashing spymaster in the British series *MI-5*, as Prince Hal in the National Theatre production of *Henry IV*, as an excruciatingly awkward Mr. Darcy in the 2005 film of *Pride & Prejudice* opposite Keira Knightley, and as charmingly stodgy Henry Wilcox in the 2017 limited series *Howards End*. But it wasn't until he slipped into the shiny leather shoes of *Succession*'s Tom Wambsgans that the depth of his talent became glaringly obvious to the wider world.

Tom is a shape-shifting opportunist, switching from craven slimeball to menacing bully from scene to scene. In the character's own words, he's a "minion wrangler and shit eater" whose ambitions have led him from middle-class Minnesota to a power seat at the Roy family table, having wed the patriarch's daughter, Shiv (Sarah Snook). But his position in the hierarchy (he runs the Fox-like ATN network) and the marriage is slippery at best. That makes Tom himself as unpredictable as an unstable weather system and has led to his tormenting of his hapless subordinate, cousin Greg (Nicholas Braun). Tom is even willing to go to prison if it will raise his standing with Logan Roy (Brian Cox), the Rupert Murdoch–like figure who built the company and will not relinquish control to his heirs.

In Macfadyen's hands, Tom has become one of *Succession*'s most sympathetic and vulnerable figures. While Kendall Roy (Jeremy Strong) spins out and calls attention to himself, Tom squirms in the margins. He quietly endures the disregard of Shiv, whose idea of sexy foreplay is to tell him she doesn't love him, and who announced on their wedding night that she wanted an open marriage—"an open-borders, free-fuck trade deal," as Tom so charmingly puts it. "I wonder if the sad I'd be without you would be less than the sad I get from being with you," he eventually tells Shiv, a stomach punch of a line in a series packed with body blows.

So many of the show's most indelible moments are etched on Tom's face, his expressions flickering between cockiness, servility, desire, and horror. By the end of season three, it's clear that all those episodes biding his time have paid off. He's become Logan's—and *Succession*'s—secret weapon.

In real life, Macfadyen has none of that Wambsgansian volatility or douchiness. He is entirely chill and smiley when I meet him in Birmingham, best known on television as the setting for *Peaky Blinders*. The hotel bar feels like the library of a British country house merged with a moody French bistro—all dark wood paneling, red velvet, and marble columns. I find Macfadyen in a corner, clad in a dark blue sweatshirt and jeans, hair askew as if he'd recently woken up. He has the vibe of a kind Sunday school teacher.

Sipping tea from a dainty, gold-rimmed teacup, Macfadyen tells me that his own children with actor Keeley Hawes are not impressed by *Succession*'s cultural cachet or the way memes about his character ricochet around the internet. Tomisms like "Buckle up, fucklehead!" or "You can't make a Tomlette without breaking some Gregs" have so penetrated the culture that they can be found on an array of Etsy goods, including a cross-stitch sampler. His kids—the youngest of whom is 15—barely pay any attention to their dad these days.

Macfadyen's own father worked in the oil industry, and his job took the family across England, Scotland, and Asia. Although he was a shy child, Macfadyen didn't feel traumatized by the regular relocations. "You feel safe because you're bumming around with your mom and dad," he recalls. Although he briefly nursed dreams of being a ski instructor, the theater soon became his great obsession. He voraciously consumed biographies and memoirs of actors like Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, and Richard Burton, seeing them almost as a road map.

"When I was 14, Kenneth Branagh was making *Henry V* and directing and had his own company and was a sort of whirlwind," he says. "And I remember thinking, That'll be me!" Macfadyen followed Branagh's path to the Royal Academy

HIS FRIEND DAVID OYELOWO RECALLS
INDISPUTABLE

of Dramatic Art, only to realize "I'm not Kenneth Branagh. I don't have that Laurence Olivier/Kenneth Branagh energy to create my own stuff. I'm very happy being purely an actor." His face lights up, as if reliving his youthful sense of relief. "Also, if you're a director, you need to know the answer to everybody's questions," he continues with a grin. "You can't go and lay down in between takes."

Not that Macfadyen lazed around. At 20, he went straight from RADA to the prestigious Cheek by Jowl theater troupe, starring in the company's traveling production of the Jacobean tragedy *Duchess of Malfi*. He expected to carry on in the theater, but then Marcia Gresham (a.k.a. Daniel Radcliffe's mother) cast him in the 1999 BBC drama *Warriors*, about U.N. peacekeepers in Bosnia. Within a few years, Macfadyen was starring in the spy series *MI-5* (known as *Spooks* in the U.K.), alongside other

promising 20-somethings like Hawes and David Oyelowo.

"The thing for me is the juxtaposition between what it's like to work with Matthew and then what you see onscreen," Oyelowo says. Although Macfadyen is six foot three and barrel-chested, he's not physically intimidating in the least when out of character. "He is the worst giggler I have ever encountered in my career," Oyelowo adds. "So before a take, you're with goofy Matthew, and then it's action and he's playing this very imposing MI5 officer. He can pull on all of that height, all of that charisma, all of that intellect." And he turns it all off again when the scene is over: "He probably has that disposition as a means of making everyone else feel comfortable."

Romance developed between Macfadyen and Hawes while shooting *MI-5*. She had very recently married the father of her young baby son. "Matthew just came straight out with it and said 'I love you' in the rain one day. I thought, Oh dear, here we go," Hawes later told a reporter. The British tabloids and paparazzi swarmed the couple, closely following Hawes's divorce and 2004 wedding to Macfadyen.

He tells me he doesn't understand people's desire to pry into the lives of actors, even though he once pored over his heroes' biographies. "If you get too much information, it takes away..."

vulnerability to Jane Austen's character and became an instant heartthrob, inspiring fan fictions and lovestruck Tumblrs. "I wish I had enjoyed it more," he says now, attempting to gracefully take a bite from a croque monsieur sandwich oozing cheese on all sides. "But I did feel pressure—maybe it was a self-imposed pressure of, you know: This is a big film, don't get it wrong." He says *Pride & Prejudice* was the first time he'd been fed through the publicity machine. "Which I didn't like and I didn't understand."

Macfadyen recalls showing up late in an unironed shirt to an event for the Hollywood Foreign Press Association—the controversial group that runs the Golden Globes—where an old gentleman told him, "You won't be nominated. Keira will be nominated." He winces slightly as he continues, "I had a little baby, and I just wanted to be at home. I wish I'd had someone to [tell me]: This is how this works. This is the game."

During the *Pride & Prejudice* shoot, the studio put him on a special diet and had a personal trainer whittle him into svelte Darcy mode. "I didn't feel very Mr. Darcy–ish," he says now. "I felt like a bit of a middle-aged dad." But Firth, the Gen X Darcy to Macfadyen's millennial Darcy, instantly grasped his successor's appeal. "I finally understood the character!" he tells me via email. "I had to write a fan letter. Definitely my favourite Darcy."

Macfadyen didn't parlay the moment into a big Hollywood career. Instead, he chose to play roles such as a pedophile in British TV movie *Secret Life.* "I sort of ended up [being offered] a lot of things that are similar to *Pride & Prejudice,* and I thought: I mustn't do that, I should try and do something different." He pauses and looks at me in a way that feels genuinely searching. "Maybe I should have done it?"

Oyelowo recalls them having a heart-to-heart years ago when he told Macfadyen: "The reality is that you are a full-bore, indisputable leading man, and you keep hiding in the corner." He adds now, "You have to persuade him he's a leading man or that he's good-looking or that he's as talented as he is. And I'm just

TELLING HIM YEARS AGO, ***"THE REALITY IS*** *THAT YOU ARE AN* ***LEADING MAN,*** *AND* ***YOU KEEP HIDING*** *IN THE CORNER."*

Macfadyen lets his sentence trail off, as he often does. Takes away from the mystique? Or the actor's ability to disappear into the role? "You just want to see them on a silver screen."

BEING A successful actor in the U.K. means that sooner or later you'll find yourself in a costume drama. In 2005, Macfadyen shot to the top of the petticoat heap when he took on Mr. Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice*—a famously brooding role previously perfected by Colin Firth. Macfadyen brought an intense shyness and glad that opportunities have continued to come along to sort of drag him into inhabiting roles that are worthy of that talent." Firth, who recently worked with Macfadyen on the Netflix movie *Operation Mincemeat,* agrees. "Even with my high expectations, I wasn't prepared for his performance in *Succession.* I can't see him anywhere in it and I don't know where it came from. I don't know if I've ever been so surprised by an actor."

TOM WAMBSGANS seems so utterly American that it's hard to believe he's being played by an Englishman, or that he was dreamed into existence by the series' British creator, Jesse Armstrong. Macfadyen worked briefly with a dialect coach in preparation for the pilot but mostly just winged it. He's delighted when fans tell him, "You sound like my Auntie Jean from St. Paul!" because he

"I WASN'T PREPARED FOR HIS PERFORMANCE IN ANYWHERE IN IT AND I DON'T KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM. I DON'T KNOW IF



wants Tom to be a blank slate onto which the audience projects. "He's like *jelly,*" Macfadyen says, splaying himself languidly across his red velvet chair.

I didn't immediately understand *Succession*'s tone: a cringe-inducing satirical dramedy that exponentially raises the discomfort levels of shows like *Veep* and its U.K. inspiration, *The Thick of It,* both of which Armstrong wrote for. "It had a very ugly energy to it," Macfadyen says of the *Succession* pilot. "Like: Am I allowed to laugh?" That tension is a crucial element of the show. "That's what makes it so delicious and excruciating at once. And that's also what makes me laugh hysterically. But it's not a normal laugh. Like, I have to be led off set. I become incapable."

Wambsgans himself rarely emits a genuine laugh on *Succession* except when he's with Greg. The characters have become soul mates, or perhaps cellmates, in the Roys' existential prison. The duo's relationship is anything but straightforward, as was signaled in the very first episode, when Tom asks Greg to kiss him—a disorienting fake-out. (Or was it?) "I think Jesse's really good at setting up a potential dynamic and testing it," Braun says. "By giving us that scene in the pilot, he knew he could then get into the *weirdness* with us." That culminated last season with Tom asking Greg to be Sporus to his Nero—a reference to the Roman emperor marrying a castrated slave boy named Sporus after killing his wife.

Macfadyen brings up the "homoerotic overtones" in Tom's reference to Nero and Sporus, which adds fuel to audience fantasies of a Tom-Greg romance. "That's great fun to play," he says. "But again, that's projection. If I look at Greg, I'm just *looking* at him. I mean, all I'm doing is just gazing at him." You're gazing at Greg the same way that Mr. Fitzwilliam Darcy gazed at Miss Elizabeth Bennet, I point out. "That's the fascinating thing, as an actor, because it's all swirling around, and so people can just sort of see what they like."

Braun hesitates to get too "gushy mushy and whatnot" but admits that he and Macfadyen are tight off-screen. "He's a mentor and really just such a good friend," he says. "He's really there as a guy for me, and I am for him. I just fucking love the guy."

TAINTED LOVE
Tom has two key "allies": cousin Greg (Nicholas Braun), whom he berates and ridicules, and his wife, Shiv (Sarah Snook), who treats him like a footstool.

COURTESY OF GRAEME HUNTER/HBO.

WHEN HE talks about Tom, Macfadyen takes on the tone of an affectionate uncle discussing a rogue nephew. "He's not without ambition and vanity," he says. That's an understatement: The last season of *Succession* ends with him betraying his wife and seemingly gliding into a new position as de facto right-hand man to Logan. As Macfadyen quips, "Tom would open the gates to the death camps." Tom is a good bureaucrat happy to shred evidence of sexual assaults and go along with Logan's plan to smear the president and pick a new, more fascist candidate to replace him. Spending so much time in his character's head during the past five years has made Macfadyen look at politicians differently. "That's the really depressing thing about the Republican Party. You think: I don't believe you, you're just a Wambsgans! You're just doing this to toe the line." We agree that *Wambsganning* should enter the common parlance. "Wambsganning! If you just are dumb and bigoted, that's [one thing]. But if you're just spinning it, then it's really contemptible."

One of the show's writers recently compared Tom to Princess Diana, which left Macfadyen trying to decode the parallels. Like Di, Tom is "slightly *other,*" he says—an outsider who never quite gains admittance to the inner sanctum. Macfadyen experienced something similar as a young man. His nomadic youth left him feeling like a kid from everywhere and nowhere. In drama school, his best friend was an actor from Liverpool. "I envied him," he says. "He had such a sense of self and place." But this rootless upbringing set him up well for inhabiting Tom, a chameleon precariously clawing his way up the Waystar Royco hierarchy.

SUCCESSION," *SAYS COLIN FIRTH. "I CAN'T SEE HIM*
I'VE EVER BEEN ***SO SURPRISED BY AN ACTOR."***

Macfadyen does have a very British approach to acting that doesn't require him to marinate in his own wellsprings of emotion and experience. When I bring up *The New Yorker*'s Jeremy Strong profile, which portrayed the actor as someone who stays inside the bubble of his suffering character while others decompress between takes, it's the one time in our nearly three-hour conversation that Macfadyen gets visibly irritated. "I find it slightly aggravating because—it makes [the show] about one thing, and it's an ensemble piece," he says of the article, noting the costars who play Gerri and Connor. "You think of J. Smith-Cameron and Alan Ruck, who are fucking extraordinary actors. [Strong] is not the main event."

Macfadyen is annoyed by the implication that actors who *don't* stay in character "aren't as invested, or as involved, as someone who's weeping in a corner." And the steeped-in-suffering approach to a character just generally baffles him. He doesn't need to stay inside Tom, because the minute they start shooting, things click into place. "I look at Jeremy—that's Kendall Roy, and so my heart starts banging a bit faster. Because I've made the imaginative leap. Because that's my job. It's not about what I'm feeling or what state I've got myself in before, or any of that. That's not to say that's wrong. That's just not useful." He describes shooting the famous boar-on-the-floor scene with visible delight. "We're in this hall in this incredible, powerful, scary, hilarious, and awful scene.... It's gladiatorial, because you're there at this table. And you're thinking, *Fuck*!" It's not hard to feel the right feelings "because the writing is there for you and Brian is shouting at you!"



MACFADYEN IS amused by the way fans treat *Succession* like *Lost,* searching in its folds for Easter eggs and clues to how long Tom was in league with Logan. Did it begin when Logan went "piss mad" and Tom took him to the bathroom, or were they in league before that? Was he the one who tipped Logan off to send doughnuts when the siblings were meeting early in season three? "I suppose it is possible," he says offhandedly, "but I certainly didn't know that."

According to Macfadyen, the writers keep a file crammed with scenes and possible relationships that haven't yet panned out. Isn't he dying to see it? "No, it's kind of nice not knowing," he says. "There's nothing more thrilling than waiting for episode four [script] to come in when you're shooting episode three. Because we don't know what's going to happen." He has his own ideas about Tom's betrayal of Shiv—"it's an accumulation of stings and belittling and humiliations"—but insists he has no idea where the writers will swerve next season. "I can imagine Tom perfectly well saying, 'I wasn't hurt, I just made a practical move!'"

Between *Succession* seasons, Macfadyen has taken on interesting but not exactly sexy roles—he played a real-life former army major who cheated on a game show in *Quiz* and a mustachioed, real-life British World War II intelligence officer in *Operation Mincemeat*. Because he and Firth had never been onscreen together before, it was a meeting of Darcys. Macfadyen jokes, "I'm the *young* Darcy, and I'm not going to let him forget it!"

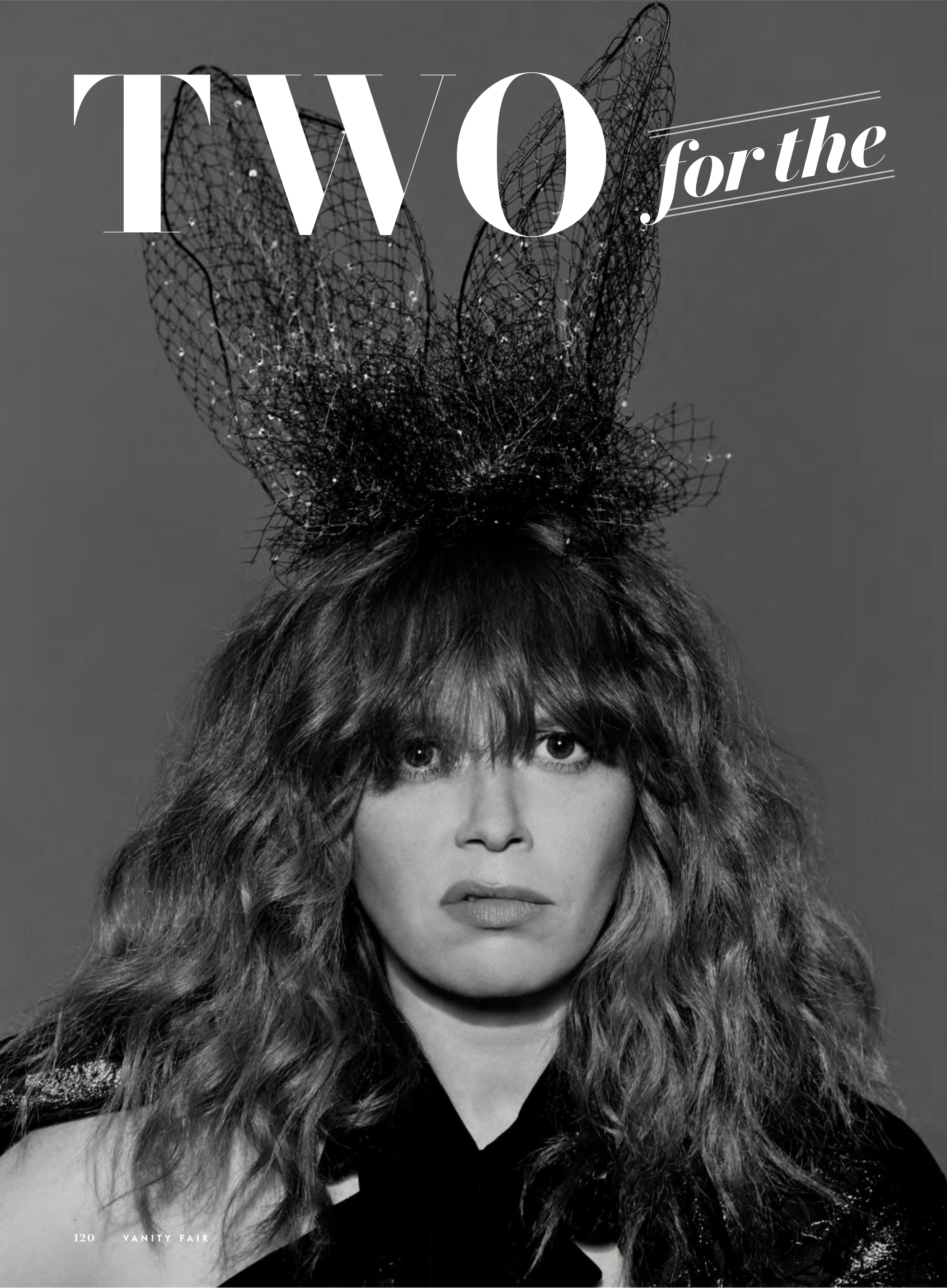
Macfadyen, who is 47, says that he didn't enjoy his 30s much. "It was like, Am I old? Am I young? Why have I put on all this weight? What am I supposed to be?" he asks, laughing quietly. "It was a relief to hit 40. And I feel quite excited about my 50s as well. It's a sneaky sense of relief." He admits he has no appetite for following so many other British actors into superhero movies or science fiction blockbusters. "I've done one big film like that, and it was a green-screen thing. It's ass-paralyzingly boring, just acting to tennis balls and dots on the screen. You're doing it for the money."

The project that has brought him to Birmingham is a movie about the British politician John Stonehouse, who spied for Czechoslovakia, got in financial trouble, and then faked his own death—"in the days when faking your death was simple," Macfadyen jokes. He shows me a picture of himself made up as Stonehouse, with wild gray hair and crooked teeth. "My performance is quite broad," he says, slipping into a silly voice.

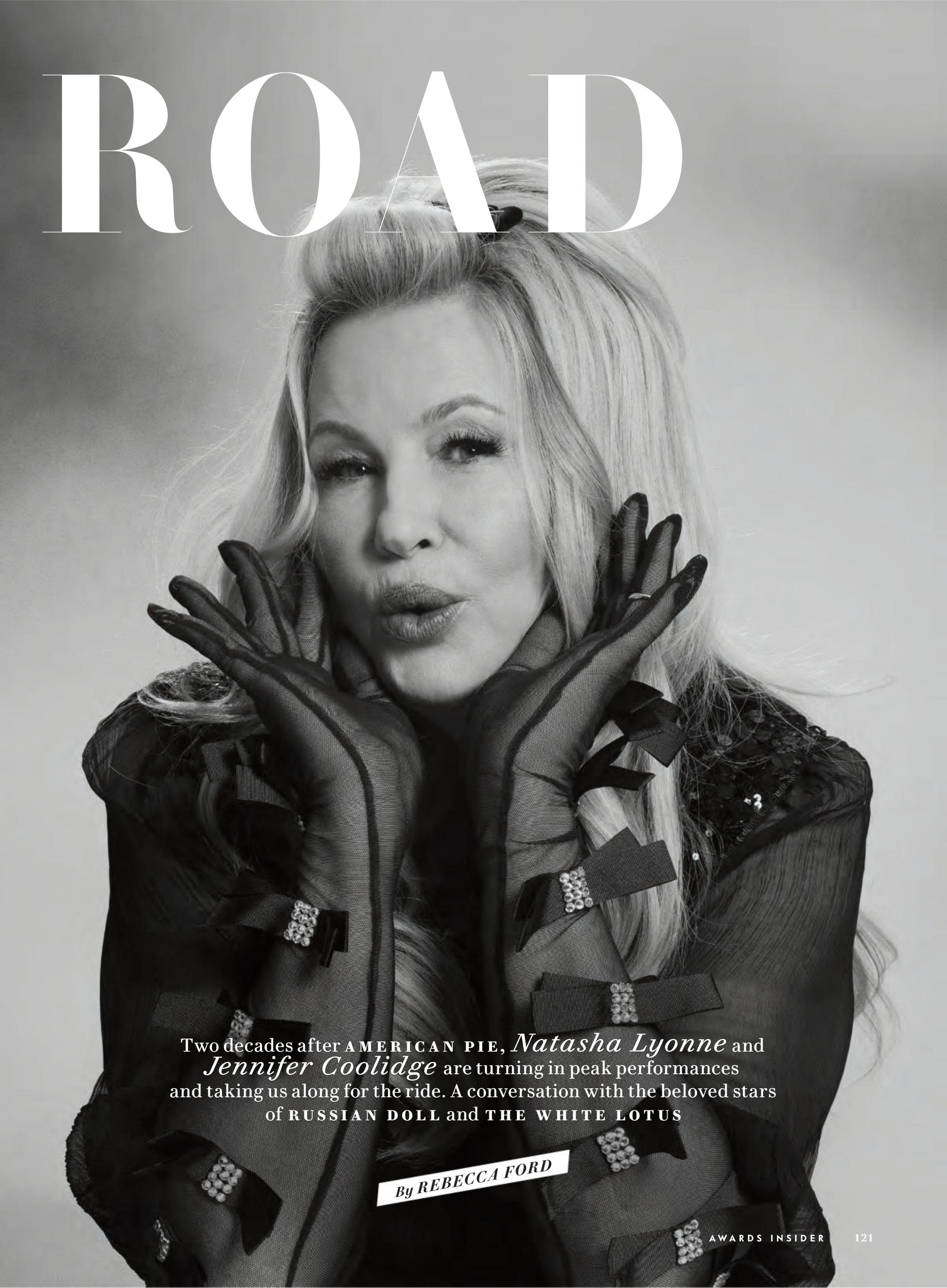
Macfadyen chooses to hide his leading-man energy inside these eccentric character parts. "I think it's a rare and beautiful quality that permeates the roles he plays, because he's never going to do that braggadocious thing," says his old colleague Oyelowo. "When I heard that this *Vanity Fair* piece was happening, I was like, 'Oh gosh, I bet Matthew is absolutely mortified!'"

In the third season of *Succession,* Kendall is eager to spill his truth in a magazine profile. He tells his siblings, "*Vanity Fair* might be doing a big thing with me.... I'm ready to really get into it all." Wouldn't it be a perfect plot twist if Tom slipped in and nabbed the profile out from under him? Wambsgans takes all. ■

TWO *for the*

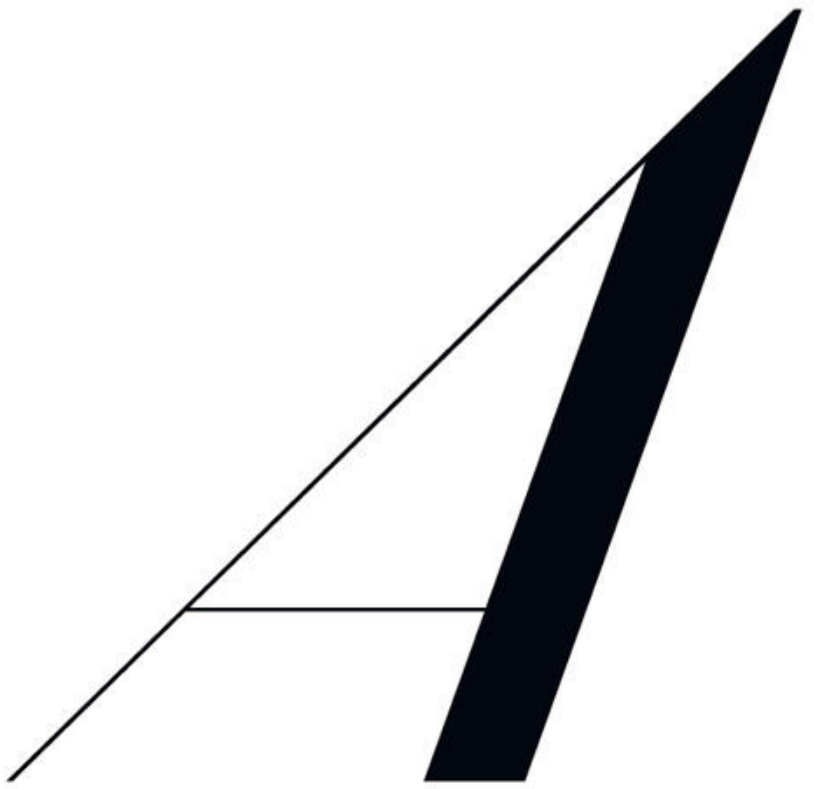


ROAD



Two decades after **AMERICAN PIE**, *Natasha Lyonne* and *Jennifer Coolidge* are turning in peak performances and taking us along for the ride. A conversation with the beloved stars of **RUSSIAN DOLL** and **THE WHITE LOTUS**

By ***REBECCA FORD***



APART FROM HAVING captivatingly good series in the current Emmy race—and two of the more memorable speaking voices on television—Jennifer Coolidge and Natasha Lyonne share a distinction that should delight trivia experts: They both appeared in 1999's teen sex comedy *American Pie.* Lyonne played the wisecracking, scene-stealing high schooler Jessica, who at one point acts out an orgasm in the halls of East Great Falls High. Coolidge was Stifler's Mom, a fantasy figure for the virginal high school boys in the movie, as well as the reason the term "MILF" entered the mainstream lexicon and never went away.

A cultural phenomenon that inspired a wave of raunchy comedies, *American Pie* was very much a product of its era—more interested in male characters than female ones—so Coolidge and Lyonne didn't get the screen time they deserved. But after a series of ups and downs, they're now doing some of their best work and claiming a power for themselves that wasn't on offer 20 years ago. As part of *V.F.*'s ongoing Reunited series, which brings actors together years after they shared the screen, I spoke to Coolidge and Lyonne about lives past, present, and future. (More pairings can be found at VF.com.)

Both actors spent their 20s in New York, struggling not just with their careers but with substance issues that landed them in rehab. Both had a difficult time breaking out of the boxes their industry put them in. But Hollywood, and especially TV, has evolved over the years. Last year, Coolidge starred in the first season of HBO's *The White Lotus* as Tanya, a wealthy, directionless woman who travels to Hawaii to spread the ashes of her recently deceased mother. Creator Mike White is a friend of Coolidge's, and the role he wrote for her allowed her to reveal a more dramatic side that's actually been there all along. Lyonne plays a woman whose mother also haunts her in many ways on Netflix's *Russian Doll,* which recently launched its second season. Lyonne cocreated, cowrites, and often directs the show, and it is inspired by her own experience with addiction. She stars as Nadia, a woman who, after pulling herself out of a time loop in the first season, finds herself journeying to the past (via NYC subway) to right an ancestral wrong.

Lyonne popped onto the video call from Los Angeles with a cigarette dangling from her mouth. Coolidge, now filming the second season of *The White Lotus,* logged on from Sicily.

Where were you at in your careers when you were making *American Pie*?

JENNIFER COOLIDGE: *American Pie* was a huge break for me. I really didn't have anything in my track record before it that anyone would know about, except an episode of *Seinfeld,* where I played Jerry's girlfriend, and two female-driven sketch shows—*She TV* and *Saturday Night Special,* with Roseanne—and both of those failed. So I had doors that I could never open until *American Pie* premiered. I had a very small part, but I'm sure you feel this way, Natasha, the timing of it was unbelievable.

NATASHA LYONNE: Yeah. It's not like it was the first teen movie sensation historically, but that was the one that started [a new trend]. Although I remember my experience of it was like deep cynicism—I think because I was a child actor. I can hear my mom at auditions telling me to enunciate, and it's funny that later in life, my mumbling was suddenly a bonus or something. When I got the script for *American Pie,* I remember being very confused and offended because it seemed so *normal* to me. I had never had a normal high school experience. I'd only had this teen angst in Manhattan, broken showbiz-kid thing. I turned it down a bunch of times because I was

"I WAS HORRIFIED BY

like, "I don't know how to do this." I was really teenaged toward it. It's a small part. I was just, like, the sidekick.

COOLIDGE: I love that you turned it down a bunch of times because that's when they really want you.

LYONNE: My weird story with *American Pie* is that in the first movie—I don't know if you know this—but I think I was the highest-paid person because I was coming off of *Slums of Beverly Hills.* Being a

LYONNE: RAMONA ROSALES/AUGUST. COOLIDGE: RYAN PFLUGER/AUGUST.

new teen actor, that was my one ingenue moment. And then, in all the consecutive movies, I got paid the least and would have the smallest part. So, they made it very clear to me that that era was over, and I really had to fight to get in them because my career was so nonexistent. I have such a bizarre relationship to that movie. Weird things would happen, like press junkets with Shannon Elizabeth—they would ask me what it felt like to be sitting next to the hot girl. And I look back and I'm like, "I was not that bad." I was 18 and 120 and ready to rumble. I look back and I'm like, "I wasn't even that fucking weird. I wasn't even like some goth chick or anything." And they made me feel like such an outsider.

Jennifer, Stifler's Mom was referred to as a MILF, which ended up popularizing the term. Did that hinder you from getting other types of roles?

COOLIDGE: I did these jobs that I felt like locked me into a certain perception. I was in this weird bubble for a really long time. And it just goes to show that you should really hold out and not just keep repeating yourself, but I was always desperate for the job. A lot of the time I was like, "I don't know if I'll ever have an offer again." Truly, except for a few fun little movie jobs like *Austenland,* it wasn't until Mike White really gave me a part

revealed to be a troubled figure all his own, but just in terms of our inner and outer perception of self, vis-à-vis your career—just as a fan and a fellow traveler or something—I have such awe and respect for *A Mighty Wind* and *Best in Show.*

COOLIDGE: Yeah, but those were all before 2000. I'm talking about maybe the last decade. I'm saying there was a period where, except for an occasional Christopher Guest movie, the scripts arriving at my door were lots of gold digger parts. It was a certain kind of thing that I had already done. I guess that's what happens to us a lot unless we steer it a different way. I wish I had been more involved in the control of my career. I just sat back, I was very passive. You're probably way smarter than me.

LYONNE: No, I mean, I have a SAG card from 1985 or something, and I'm 43, and it's been a long, rocky fucking road. But I do remember when a change happened. I want to say seven years ago or so—if you were at all something that they couldn't easily categorize—they started saying, "Well, why don't you write something for yourself?" And that was very different than it had been in the early 2000s where, if you were an actor, your job was to stay an actor and try to find

COOLIDGE: I'm a sidekick too, sometimes.

LYONNE: It's only recently that they said, "Center the sidekick, and see how that alters the whole system." And it's been thrilling. Like Michaela Coel or Donald Glover—there's so many people that used to be the sidekick who have taken center stage. It's so much more humanizing to watch because it's more identifiable than this cookie-cutter assembly-line shtick that showbiz has been doing for decades.

Jennifer, do you ever think of writing or creating something for yourself now?

COOLIDGE: I've had some ideas for my own show and, at one point way back, I had a development deal with NBC. I wanted to do this show playing a blue blood girl from Boston living in one of the Dakotas. Her parents owned this giant apartment in the Dakotas but they left. And I was the rich girl but didn't have any access to my money, and then there was a poor girl that was my best friend. This is way before *2 Broke Girls.* It didn't happen. NBC ended up putting me on *Joey.* Who knows what would've happened with that show. It's hard to know who you are sometimes, and it's weird how you have this idea of who you think you are.

SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HE PUT INTO THE WHITE LOTUS ***BECAUSE THEY ARE ME*** *AND SOME OF THEM AREN'T VERY GOOD."*

[in *The White Lotus*] where I was really playing something very different. Look, everything happens in its time, but there was this very long period of just repeating myself.

LYONNE: I don't know if you've ever seen the Phil Spector documentary, but Phil Spector talks in the documentary about Tony Bennett and he's like, "It was always Tony Bennett." The public loved Tony Bennett and not Phil Spector. Of course, Phil was

yourself roles. I remember this defined switch where it was almost like people were exasperated with me, like, "We don't know what to do with you. Why don't you go try and figure out something to do for yourself?" There wasn't the language for it in the way that there is now of this idea of a person's specificity. For me, it was like, "Hey, I'm fucking Ratso Rizzo"—the sidekick in all movies, in all TV shows, that's it.

Mike White is a very smart friend of mine, and I think he's just observed me over the years and figured out this funny, weird stuff that I would never know about myself. Some of it's really unflattering. I mean, I was horrified by some of the things that he put into *The White Lotus* because they *are* me and some of them aren't very good. I could never have written that because I don't CONTINUED ON PAGE 126



As they end their runs, we bid adieu to 14 series that left their mark

FOND

By
HILLARY BUSIS

Illustration by
CAROLYN RIDSDALE

THE WALKING DEAD

AMC

Can you believe that after a decade-plus of daring rescues and gnarly deaths, AMC's flagship drama is shuffling to an end—without a single character *ever* uttering the word *zombie*?! Here's hoping Rick Grimes shows up for one last hurrah before the last bite.

THIS IS US

NBC

With hugs and many tissues, the Pearson clan's timeline-twisting saga—an old-fashioned feel-good weepie, which inspired imitators and made Sterling K. Brown a household name—has come to a close. Yet the slow cooker that so cruelly took patriarch Jack's life remains at large.

INSECURE

HBO

Issa Rae's love letter to Los Angeles was as sure-footed as its characters were shaky, confidently following Rae's Issa and Yvonne Orji's Molly as they fumbled their way through adulthood. Like its protagonists, the show only went deeper with time. You know what that is? Growth.

BLACK-ISH

ABC

Though network TV's first family may have lobbed their final punch lines, Kenya Barris's universe lives on-ish: Freeform is still airing spin-off *Grown-ish*, which follows the young-adult adventures of Yara Shahidi's ambitious, aspiring fashionista, Zoey.

BETTER CALL SAUL

AMC

We could argue all day about whether Vince Gilligan and Peter Gould's *Breaking Bad* spin-off eclipses the original. But *Saul* is a masterpiece all its own, stuffed with gorgeous sequences and indelible performances. And yes, it *is* better than *Breaking Bad.*

QUEEN SUGAR

OWN

Before *Succession*, another group of fractured siblings struggled to hold onto the family business in a power vacuum: the Bordelon brood, suddenly the stewards of a Louisiana sugarcane farm. Come for the clashing personalities, stay for the thoughtful handling of heavy subjects.

DEAD TO ME

Netflix

Few friendships are more unlikely than that of Jen Harding and Judy Hale's, the mismatched pair at the center of Liz Feldman's pitch-black comedy. But that's the appeal of *Dead to Me*, which will debut its long-awaited third and final season this year after a barrage of delays.

THIS IS US: JOE PUGLIESE/NBC. *BLACK-ISH*: ABC. *THE WALKING DEAD*, *BETTER CALL SAUL*, *KILLING EVE*: AMC. *INSECURE*, *SEARCH PARTY*: HBO. *QUEEN SUGAR*: WARNER BROS. ENTERTAINMENT. *DEAD TO ME*, *OZARK*: NETFLIX. *PEN15*: HULU. *THE EXPANSE*: PRIME VIDEO. *DICKINSON*: APPLE. *PEAKY BLINDERS*: BBC.



FAREWELLS

PEN15

Hulu

Maya Erskine and Anna Konkle's hilarious, earnest, sometimes-hard-to-watch comedy about a pair of best friends navigating the murkiest part of adolescence is truly 2 good 2 be 4gotten.

KILLING EVE

BBC America

The Sandra Oh–aissance began with this irresistible cat-and-mouse thriller, which (despite an unpopular final episode) showed off an incredible array of female talent in front of *and* behind the camera, including Jodie Comer, Fiona Shaw, Emerald Fennell, and creator Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

OZARK

Netflix

In 2017, Wendy and Marty Byrde moved their kids to the titular region and embraced a life of money laundering, murder, and dubious couples counseling. After four riveting seasons, a bucket of Emmy love, and the skyrocketing of Julia Garner's career, it seems they made the right call.

THE EXPANSE

Amazon

There was broad scope *and* laser focus in this sci-fi series, a galactic epic that excelled in telling human stories as well as giving Shohreh Aghdashloo stunning outfits. Its last season focused largely on emotional catharsis, proving conclusively that in space, people *can* hear you form lasting connections.

PEAKY BLINDERS

Netflix

What, exactly, is a peaky blinder? You'll never know unless you devour this absorbing crime drama, which follows an Irish gang in post–World War I England. Pro tip: The lads are speaking English, but closed-captioning is a boon for American ears.

DICKINSON

Apple TV+

"Tell all the truth but tell it slant." The opening line from one of Emily Dickinson's best-known poems doubles as the credo of Alena Smith's biographical comedy, which took charming liberty with the poet's life story—including a flash-forward that allowed Emily to peek into the 20th century.

SEARCH PARTY

HBO Max

The worst people in the world make for compelling comedy. No show was sillier (there's a character named Dr. Amanda Baby) while skewering millennial myopia, peppering wild twists with uncomfortable truths.

It's All in the Game



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 98

KOREA'S CULTURAL HISTORY has helped make *Squid Game* possible. Lee in particular is quick to acknowledge this debt, invoking the terms 선배 (pronounced "seun-bae") and 후배 ("hu-bae"), which roughly mean "elder" and "junior." The impact of Korean culture, already powerful in much of the world, has lately been growing in the U.S. with *Parasite, Minari,* Blackpink, *The Vengeance Trilogy,* BTS, Psy, K-dramas galore, and the new adaptation of the beloved best seller *Pachinko.* "This is not something I believe I created," Lee says of the ascendancy of *Squid Game.* "It was handed to us." He wants to pass his legacy on to his 후배—that is, to younger actors—and colleagues. "I think a lot about how to share this very special experience that I was lucky enough to have, so that when it happens to them later on, they can do a better job of navigating that space."

When I ask Hwang how he explains his country's prominence in global culture, he points out that South Korea is physically cut off from the rest of the world: If you're traveling by car or train, North Korea stands between you and everywhere else. With 52 million people overspilling a small, isolated piece of land, Hwang says, Koreans have a highly competitive society. Since childhood, he's heard that he should never just focus on domestic markets. "We have to export, export, export," he says. "And we have to let Korea be known in the world."

I tell him that Korean friends and I joke that, as far as we know, it's possible that no group in the U.S. can beat us for competitiveness—and that this could be both a strength and something of a tragic flaw.

"It's very stressful," Hwang says, and I say yes, it is.

HWANG IS IN the midst of final discussions with Netflix for a second season of *Squid Game* and anticipates that it could be out by the end of 2023 or 2024. He only has about three pages' worth of ideas that he plans to turn into a script, so there isn't much he can say except that there will be more games: "Humanity is going to be put to a test through those games once again." Gi-hun is definitely coming back. Hwang has mentioned elsewhere that the mysterious Front Man from the first round of games might play more of a role, but this seems like a maybe.

What do the actors themselves hope to see in a second season? "I just want Gi-hun to have a more happy life," says Hoyeon. Sae-byeok and Sang-woo appear to have died, but Lee hopes that Sae-byeok has a twin sister, and that Sang-woo has actually been whisked away by the game operatives in time to keep him alive, so he can work with Hoyeon and Park again. For his part, Park says his great hope is that Korean shows and movies will reach even more people. But when Hoyeon jokes that she wants an amusement park, with stations for the different games, Park says he wants that too—plus figurines of the cast. *Squid Game* aside, Hoyeon is considering her next steps, and Park is starring in a Korean Netflix remake of the Spanish hit show *Money Heist.* Lee's directorial debut, *Hunt,* will be released this summer.

Asked if the second season of *Squid Game* will have the same thematic preoccupations, Hwang says, "I want to ask the question, 'Is true solidarity between humans possible?'" Living in this time of global crisis, it's clear to Hwang that the only way we can overcome the challenges facing our species is with solidarity. Toward the close of the first season, it seemed increasingly possible that, rather than fight to have a single winner, people could have worked together to win as a team. I ask Hwang if he'd had that message in mind. He says he wanted to leave room for this interpretation, but since the characters in the game were "focused on wanting to kill each other off," they weren't capable of surviving as a group. He compares it to humanity's current situation: People seem more like racehorses, just trying to outpace each other.

Hwang believes the outcome could have been different if the *Squid Game* characters had been able to look outside themselves: "If they were capable of talking with one another, of cooperating with one another, I do agree that there could have been a possibility that we could have seen more winners." ■

Two for the Road



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 123

see myself that way. Sometimes it's good to team up with people who have a better idea of who you are—and the funny part about you—instead of your own stupid idea of yourself.

LYONNE: That Dakota show, it sounds pretty funny, actually. But you and Mike White together, fuck it, it is revelatory. When you walk on in *The White Lotus,* that is a fucking performance. You're just so in the pocket. For whatever reason, events collide—your history with Mike or this moment in your life or the role and the costume and the setting and, just once in a fucking blue moon, something like that happens. I think that is a very big deal. Are you out there now? Are you with little Aubrey [Plaza]? My friend Aubrey?

COOLIDGE: Yes. She just dinged my phone. You're the cool girls. Of course you're friends with Aubrey because you're the cool rebel girls that we all want to be.

LYONNE: Honey, we want you—we want you in our girl gang.

What's it been like to bring these characters back for a second season and develop them further?

COOLIDGE: I really like playing someone who's oblivious, because I feel bad for people that are oblivious. I like playing someone I really have sympathy for. There's a lot of these people out there who are just completely isolated by their money but aren't horrible people. Money can do incredibly weird stuff to you and barricade you from any real experience. Some of it's your fault and some of it isn't. Natasha, you've been on a roll with your part. I mean, people have been obsessed for quite a bit now, and it must feel very good.

LYONNE: It's so rare and lucky to fall into a role. In many ways, Nadia in *Russian Doll* is a character that I've been creating, I don't know, since I was probably, like, 25. I was working for 20 years to develop this Mae West drag character, who I then put into the world. It's funny that people just assume that that's *you.* I think that when something is so in the pocket—that's what you're talking about, Jennifer—they struggle to separate church and state, and they just assume that it arrived fully formed, like an accident. We understand when it's drama, when it's Meryl Streep. There's an accent and a voice and a wig and, "Oh, my God, I can see the work." Yet for some reason, as soon as it's funny or sparky, it seems kind of, "Oh, that's just *them.*"

COOLIDGE: I feel like if COVID hadn't happened, I don't think I would've been able to do the part. Before I started *The White Lotus,* it was such a sad time. I was so sad and depressed for eight or nine months that it worked. It was completely in parallel with the character that was mourning her mother. I think sometimes you need some horrible thing to happen—or something that's similar to what you're going into—and somehow it doesn't even feel like you're working. Do you have that?

LYONNE: Oh yeah, it's very weird the way where you're at meets a role. It's probably why it's important to have a life in a way, even if it's a negative one. It might even be why we're so obsessed with actors—we see them shift over the years as they go through stuff. We think that there's just something sick with us, a superficial obsession with tabloid stuff or something, but it might be that on a deeper human level, we're noticing the way they're shifting as performers because of their weird life experiences. And it makes us feel connected to them.

COOLIDGE: *Russian Doll* has a really funny premise. Was it one of you who came up with it or did the three of you?

LYONNE: You mean the idea of dying and coming back to life?

COOLIDGE: Yeah, and just reliving in many different ways, sometimes in the same episode.

LYONNE: There was so much conversation that went into it. Leslye [Headland] and I would just lay on the floor of my weird studio apartment dreaming up situations. And I remember at one point Amy [Poehler] and I sitting in my car. We were just parked somewhere, and we started talking about this idea of "choose your own adventure," where you could keep going back to a party in New York City and try each iteration of going home with different people. You would have different experiences with everybody there. Sometimes it would be platonic and sometimes it would be a three-way and sometimes it would be nothing at all. Sometimes you'd be crying about your childhood and sometimes you'd be up all night doing cocaine or whatever. And that at the end of all those scenarios—if you could play them out for about a year and a half—you'd probably still be left with yourself if you weren't caught up to any personal change yet. We walk into these situations thinking, Surely there's a solution to my *me* problem out there somewhere.

One of my favorite movies is *All That Jazz*. I'm very into the genre of from-the-deathbed flashing back to a life. It has just been so much my personal experience of all my drug shenanigans and hell trouble that I would be sitting in these weird hospital rooms flashing back to moments and all my mistakes and injuries, and iterations thereof, of what could have been, if only I hadn't been such a fuckup.

COOLIDGE: It was just very clever. I was just so curious, like, were you all fucked up one night and then one of you just said, "Oh, my God...."

LYONNE: I will say, nobody was ever fucked up in the making of that show. It was always like a philosophical expedition or something to put the solution to the human problem, which always just opens up life and death. We're all going to die, we know that. And yet, we go on as if the stakes are so high. I'm always just so miffed by that.

What do you still want to do and where do you see your careers going in 5 or 10 years?

COOLIDGE: I've only had two Broadway experiences. I would love to do a great play. I want to do some very real stuff, documentary-type stuff, just things that I feel very passionate about.

LYONNE: I'm excited to see that play, and I'm excited to see those documentaries. For me, I've written a movie and I'd love to direct it. I just want to get into my whole Penny Marshall–meets–Fellini phase of life. I think that's the most happy I am, and I don't know if it's because I have a weird relationship with acting from being a kid. It feels like the area where my defects become assets. There's a lot of boxes that we put female filmmakers into—even by just labeling them female filmmakers. I want to get good enough to be a heavy. That way, those young girls can see that they can do whatever the fuck they want, that they can tell whatever story they want.

COOLIDGE: I bet you have a lot of girls that idolize you. I bet you have a lot.

LYONNE: I love heavy-duty ladies. I'm so happy that we're in this era. It's very important to me that it's not a trend. That other shit was the pits—the "try to be like everybody else all the time" game. I mean, strictly from a dieting perspective, it was unmanageable. I hated it, it was awful.

COOLIDGE: Not fitting into any slot is just the worst. There was a certain type of girl when I was coming up the pike that I couldn't be—and that girl was getting all the parts. But now, you're right, the doors have opened. You can be all sorts of things.

LYONNE: Jennifer, I'm such a fan of yours. I really hope we get to do something together someday. *American Pie 10*. It's just us hanging out. You're in a convertible. We're just Thelma and Louise in *American Pie X, American Pie XXX, American Pie 30*.

COOLIDGE: I'm totally into it, I swear to God. So, we'll plant the seed. We'll plant it. ■

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Summer Of Style

AMA THE LABEL



London-based AMA THE LABEL's creative process involves recovering pastime elements and merging these aspects with contemporaneity. With experimental direction being the label's foundation, the brand commits itself to ethical labour and sourcing natural materials to produce conscious garments. With each collection, AMA showcases its eclectic instinct.

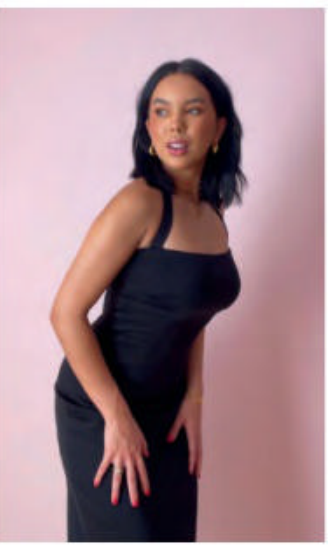
Visit **amathelabel.studio**
IG: **@amathelabel.studio**

SORBAS SHOES



Livin' is easy, when you wear the right sandals. SORBAS Berlin's vegetable tanned leather sandals reflect the laid back, elegant lifestyle of the Greek islands where the sandals are made. Find many more sustainable sandals and sneakers this summer on their online shop **sorbasshoes.com** and visit **@sorbasberlin** on IG for more inspiration on ethically crafted shoes.

LIAN BY LIAN



Based in Australia, LIAN BY LIAN is a new and upcoming brand for the effortlessly chic woman that everyone is. Founded and meticulously designed by Rachelle Gosden, her pieces are created with the finest quality materials in limited quantities, giving your wardrobe a luxurious edge. Visit: **lianbylian.com.au**
IG: **@lian.by.lian**

LINDA MEYER HENTSCHEL



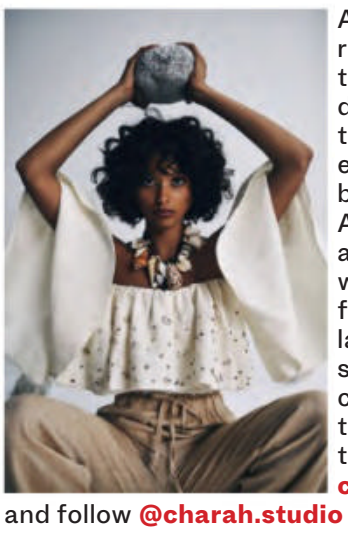
It began with Linda's quest to find the perfect white T-shirt. It didn't exist, so she created it. This became the foundation of her everyday luxury prêt-à-porter collection: a fusion of exquisite quality and precious fabrics including superior cashmere and rare Sea Island cotton, incorporating timeless design and the finest artisanry from Italy.
Visit: **lindameyerhentschel.com**
IG: **@lindameyerhentschel**

THE VILLA



This female founded brand is one to look out for, with their signature bridal collections and feathered sleepwear. The Villa is the epitome of luxury sleepwear, ensuring quality is at the forefront of each of their designs. Perfect for those special moments. Photography by Caitlin Ruth. To find out more, visit **thevillaau.com**
IG: **@thevillaau**

CHARAH STUDIO



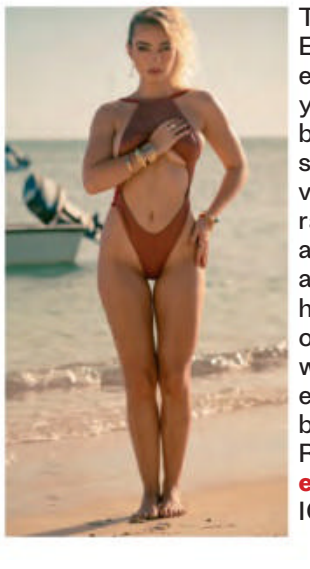
A lifestyle brand that reimagines the traditional for a divergent modern and timeless feminine experience. Founded by Kuwaiti Maryam AlSharrah on ancestral tributes as well as unfussy feminine lines. Their latest collection showcases the classic caftan with a timeless modern twist. For more, visit **charahstudio.com** and follow **@charah.studio** on IG.

PYLINTARO



Designed and produced in Melbourne, Australia, Pylintaro designs and meticulously creates timeless and staple pieces for your wardrobe. Their pieces offer a fresh combination of comfort and style, and can be worn wherever, whenever – perfect for any occasion.
Visit: **pylintaro.com**
IG: **@pylintaro**

EIGHT SWIMWEAR



The best of both worlds, Eight Swimwear embodies an elegant yet bold take on beach-to-town swimwear. With versatile pieces that range from refined and minimal to luscious and vibrant, each piece honours the pursuit of evolving femininity with elegance and edge. Photography by Sebastian Romero. Visit **eightswimwear.com**
IG: **@eightswimwear**

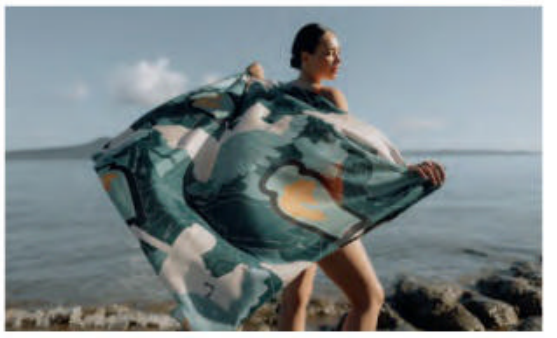
BELLA BRETT



The desire for a kinder and more authentic approach to fashion led to the creation of Bella Brett; an imaginative brand that inspires expression and fosters harmony between clothing, people and the planet. Sustainability is core to the brand, informing every decision. Their pieces are handmade to order in Scotland and will fit seamlessly into your wardrobe, transitioning from season to season. Treading the line between signature elegance and vintage-style cool.

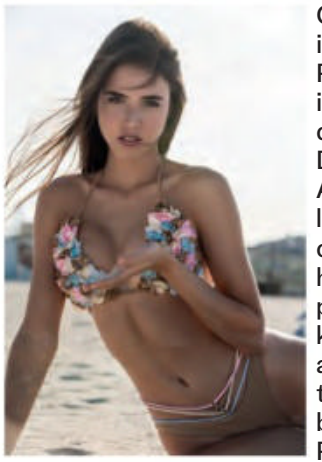
Visit **bellabrett.com** IG: **@bella.brett**

WALKER & BING



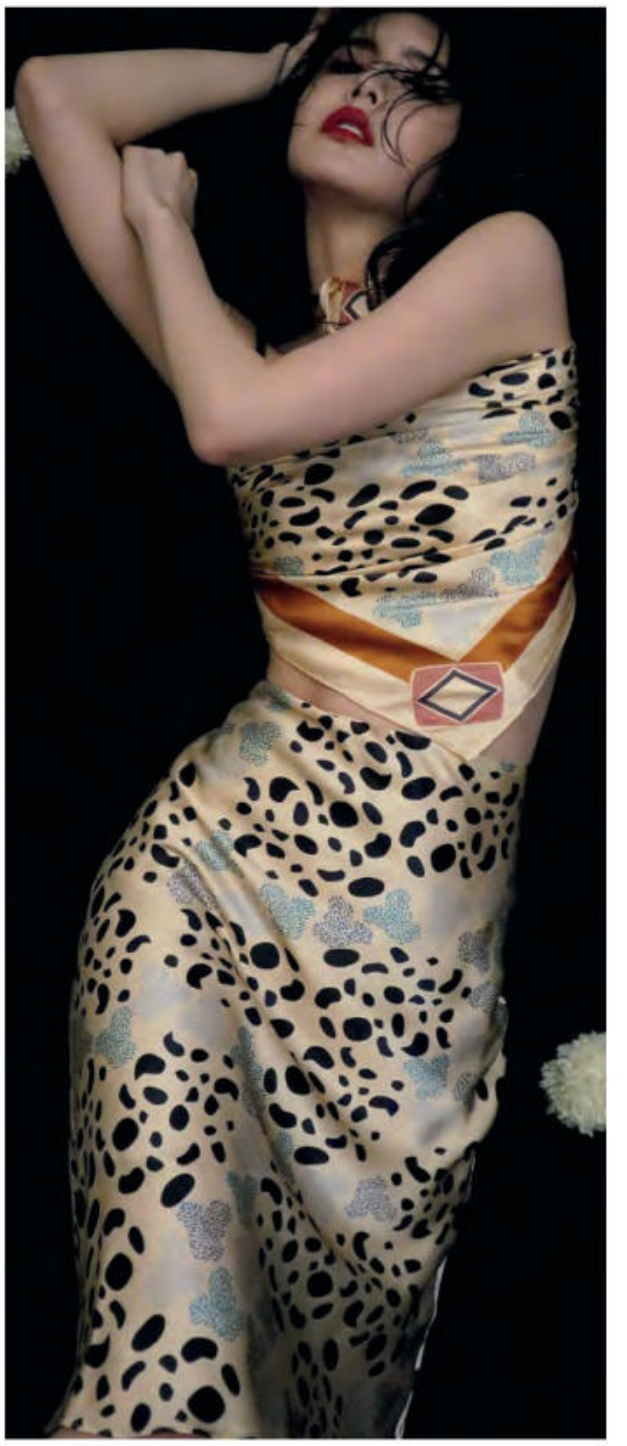
Soft summer days lounging around under trees, with the sun gently filtering through. Walker & Bing sarongs in silk cotton are hand-rolled and beautifully soft to touch. They can be worn over swimwear or as a vibrant pop of colour when styled as a scarf or wrap, in any season. Visit: **walkerandbing.com** IG: **@walker_and_bing**

ORZA



ORZA presents its swimwear Petal Collection, incorporating a flower design made by hand. Designed by founder Aurélie Alezeraa, she likes to work around colour through harmonising parma, pink and white. She knows how to create a balance, and from this harmony is born a bewitching sensuality. Photographer Marc Richet. Visit: **orzaboutique.com** IG: **@orza_luxury_swimwear_paris**

LAVEAU



Laveau is a sustainably-minded brand unafraid to be confidently lost, helping people see beauty within imperfection. The prints are pieces from drawings that are recreated into the adventurous, whimsical, and ethereal prints featured in Laveau's designs to commemorate and appreciate the hurdles one has to go through in life.

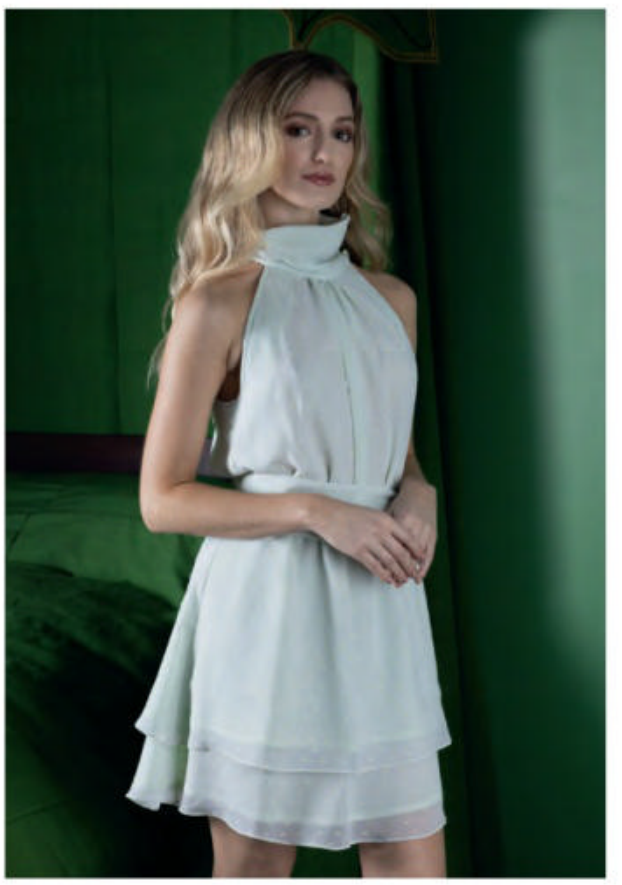
Visit **laveaucollection.com** IG: **@laveauofficial**

ASHLEY STAMBOULI



Ashley Stambouli is a high-end womenswear brand by a Venezuelan fashion designer. Focused on designing for the woman who embraces sophistication and elegance, the brand strives for unique chicness. All pieces are exclusively handmade in the Miami Atelier. Visit **ashleystambouli.com** and follow **@ashleystambouli** on FB and IG.

RACHEL WALTERS COLLECTION



Rachel Walters Collection is a luxury contemporary collection cut from natural fibres in flattering, yet unique silhouettes. The collection is both current, timeless, and speaks to a streamlined and romantically elegant woman. It includes ethically produced ready-to-wear garments, and pieces can be customised to client's preferences.

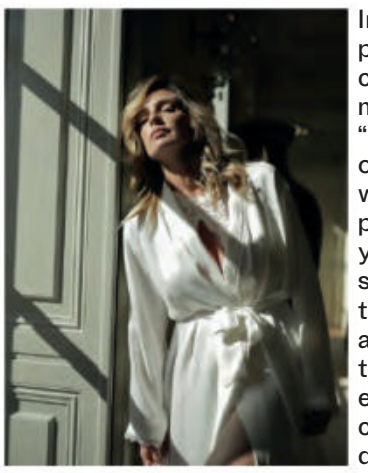
Visit **rachel-walters.com** IG: **@rachelwalterscollection**

LXRY APPAREL



LXRY Apparel is a fashion house based in Atlanta, redefining the idea of luxury. Specialising in outerwear, the brand intentionally contrasts high-end garments with nostalgic vintage touches, providing your wardrobe with an authentic yet stylish edge. Visit: **lxryapparel.com** IG: **@lxryappvrel_**

LEIZI



Introducing LEIZI, pioneering wellness couture loungewear made using organic "Orange Silk" from orange peel. LEIZI was founded in the pursuit to improve your sleep, hair and skin quality thanks to its properties and marvellous touch. Regain the energy and confidence you deserve. Discover the collection online at **leizicollection.com** and **@leizicollection** on IG.

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Summer Of Style

BLUECARATS



BlueCarats teamed up with New York artist Andrew "Artek" Thiele to fuse art and fashion. Their collection includes acrylic hand painted denim and a seven piece collection of hand-painted BlueCarats Signature Bandanas. Each comes framed with a different design. They are available in Summer 2022.

Visit: **bluecarats.com** or **@bluecarats** and **@arteknyc** on IG.

NUDI CONCEPT



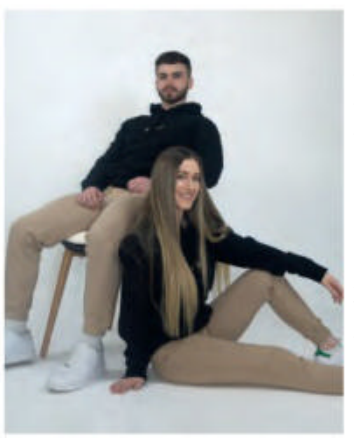
It's all about timeless straw. Nudi Concept allows you to shop ethically whilst simultaneously being at the height of fashion. Each bag is handcrafted in small batches by artisans from around the globe. In store they offer a range of leather bags and carefully sourced decorative antiques. Visit: **nudiconceptstore.com**
IG: **@nudiconceptstore**

LIBANATI



Designed by Stephanie Libanati and sustainably produced in LA, her namesake collection blends an uninhibited beach style with a South American urban instinct, inspired by her upbringing between Southern California and Buenos Aires. Stephanie's one-of-a-kind garments are ethically handmade from deadstock fabrics and excess military textiles.
Visit **libanati.com**
IG: **@libanati**

SOUL SELF APPAREL



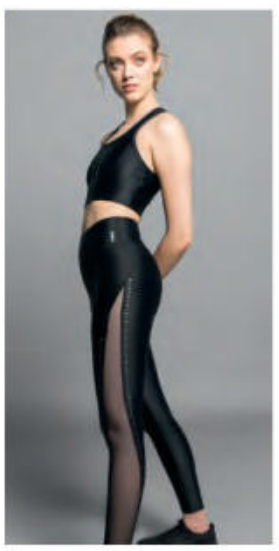
Soul Self Apparel is making an impact through clothing that goes beyond the material and instead leaves people connected, inspired and free to live out their soul self. Founded in Vancouver, Canada, their inclusive clothing spreads empowering messages, donates to mental health initiatives and takes action on sustainability. Visit **soulself.ca**
IG: **@soulselfapparel**

BONGIORNO



Bongiorno is a leader in design and custom-made headwear, often collaborating with iconic brands and local institutions. Mister Softee Bucket hats are back in stock, just in time for the Spring/Summer season.
Visit **bongiornobrand.com** IG: **@bongiorno**

ANKHO



Designed for performance and beyond, Ankho is founded with passion for innovation, an eye for design, and a sustainable mindset. Using a fusion of premium Italian fabrics and innovative finishing techniques, the brand creates activewear that is unique and comfortable. Ethically produced in Europe, Ankho is for active, brave, and bold women anywhere.
Visit **ankhoactive.com**
IG: **@ankhoactive**

VIVIENNE PASH



Originally from Jamaica, New York based fashion designer Vivienne Pash started her career from an early age. With a true passion at heart and a natural skill for design, Vivienne fueled her imagination and was able to visualise a series of new collections which she brings to life each season. Visit:
viviennepash.com
IG: **@viviennepash**

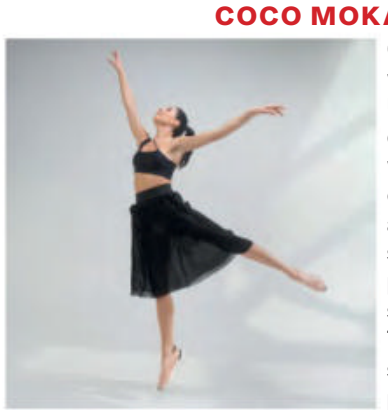
ROBERT KALINKIN



Robert Kalinkin is a brand that expresses raw elegance with a militaristic edge for a confident spin. Innovative design ideas allow the label to redefine beauty in a way that lets the client alter dashing looks for every occasion.

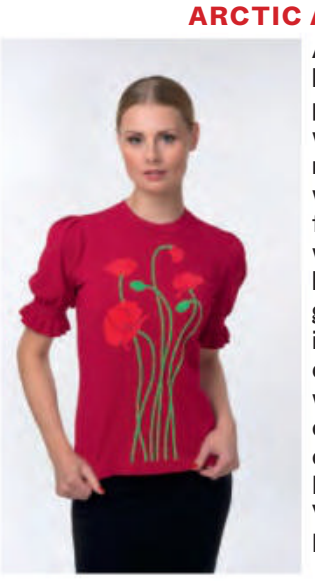
For more visit **robertkalinkin.com**
IG: **@robertkalinkin**

COCO MOKA



COCO MOKA was founded by a Ukrainian female entrepreneur with the purpose of creating activewear suitable for people with sensitive skin. The fabrics are silky and smooth, perfect for those with sensitivity issues. Their summer collection includes silky transparent skirts made from plisse fabric, which you can wear over leggings and combine with different tops and jackets.
Visit **coco-moka.com** IG: **@cocomokaoriginal**

ARCTIC AFFAIR



Arctic Affair creates luxury knitwear, perfect for the working woman. Born from a need to look elegant whilst also wanting to feel warm and cosy when sitting in business meetings. All garments are produced in Italy using high-quality, luxurious yarn while respecting environmental and ethical standards. Photo by Olga Makina.
Visit **arcticaffair.com**
IG: **arctic_affair**

Face Value

1. LUNA SKINS introduces its Shea Glow Moisturiser. The product helps to leave your skin feeling hydrated and aims to reduce the appearance of scars and stretch marks. Vegan and contains natural ingredients. Visit: **lunaskins.co.uk** IG: **@lunaskins_**

2. AZIO BEAUTY's Intense Firming Face Serum targets the appearance of wrinkles and fine lines. It is formulated with a peptide complex. This product aims to leave you with skin that is visibly brighter and feels firmer. Visit **aziobeauty.com** IG: **@azio.beauty**

3. LUMINARY's Booster Oil helps to reduce the appearance of fine lines and hyperpigmentation. The Eye Treatment Oil is formulated to leave the skin around the eyes appearing brighter. Get your glow on and use VANITY10 for 10% off all purchases [expires 01/07/22]. Visit **luminary-skincare.com** IG: **@luminaryskincarelondon**

4. AMARE VITA SKINCARE. All Eye Need is a night and day eye concentrate that aims to tackle the appearance of puffiness, dark circles, and wrinkles. Fragrance-free and rich in probiotics, green tea, coenzyme Q10, and caffeine. Its cooling effect aims to leave the skin feeling firmer. Visit **amarevitaskincare.com** IG: **@amarevitaskincare**

5. The Essence by **THE WILD TOGETHER**, is designed for people who want their skin to feel its best everyday. It helps to leave your skin feeling hydrated and appearing brighter, whilst also preparing your skin for the regime that follows. This product is made up of 16 sources of botanicals, vitamins and minerals. Visit **thewildtogether.com** IG: **@thewildtogether**

6. DEWDROP SKINCARE™ is one of the first Premium Ayurvedic Skincare Ranges from South Africa. With over 4 years invested in research and development, their Brightening Saffron Elixir Serum aims to help with the appearance of hyperpigmentation and uneven skin tone. Visit **dewdropskincare.co.za** IG: **@dewdrop_skincare**

7. MERCY BORN's C-Brightening Face Serum is a lightweight face serum packed with vitamin C and five different peptides. This fragrance-free vitamin C serum absorbs quickly, aiming to leave your skin feeling firm and appearing brighter. Visit: **mercyborn.com** IG: **@mercybornofficial**

8. Ethical bath and body brand **WHITE LILY SHOPPE** boast truly clean ingredients and formulations. Their products make thoughtful gifts, wrapped in sustainable packaging because self-care starts with the care for our planet. Visit **whitelilyshoppe.com** IG: **@whitelilyshoppe**

9. KSK WELLNESS' Luxury Body Oil is an innovative blend of organic botanical oils. The product aims to leave even the most irritated dry skin feeling hydrated and softened. The oil nourishes your skin with moisture, leaving it feeling velvety soft. Visit **kskwellness.com** IG: **@kskwellness**

10. RESTORVA's Luminous Botanical Moisturizer is derived from desert botanicals. The formula is as natural as it is luxurious. It is designed to leave your skin feeling hydrated, smooth the appearance of impurities, and give you a radiant-looking glow. Visit **restorva.com** IG: **@restorva**

11. MAZILLO's Regenerate + Protect Essence Toner is created to leave skin feeling hydrated and refreshed, making it a perfect addition to your skincare routine. The toner is formulated with Calendula stem cells. The product aims to help reduce the appearance of fine lines and is gentle to all skin types. Visit **mazillo.com** IG: **@mazilloskincare**

12. SANTE ESSENTIALS progressively embodies a love for traditional organic grooming with a contemporary air of luxury, personality, expression and diversity. They celebrate the miraculous minerals of nature [especially that of West Africa] whilst exploring the inherent beauty of humanity, breaking away from the outdated mainstream beauty standard. Visit **santeessentials.com** IG: **@santeessential**

13. Say hello to **ORGANIC ESSENTIALS HAIR CARE**, Moisture Replenishing hair care system. Formulated with the aim to foster green growth and promote healthy looking hair. Curated with sustainably sourced high-quality ingredients. Helping to hydrate and nourish with moisture, leaving hair feeling strengthened and restored. Visit **oehaircare.com** IG: **@oehaircare**

14. Meet **'JENTL**, an organic hand-whipped body butter that melts into the skin. With a variety of scent profiles to choose from, 'JENTL's collection of small-batch whipped body butters leaves skin feeling soft and nourished with moisture. Due to the nature of the product, the shop will be closed in July and August 2022. Visit: **jentl.com** IG: **@jentl.coo**

15. GEMINI BEAUTY's three products have the ultimate goal of crafting the appearance of a dewy and glowing complexion. Their products aim to add a boost of hydration to the skin. Gemini Beauty believes in creating products with unique ingredients and supports the Lupus community. Visit **geminibeauty.com** IG: **@geminibeautyproducts**

16. RELLON BEAUTY's easy-to-apply, vegan-friendly, and cruelty-free lashes are the ultimate way to complete your look. Available in both dramatic and natural styles, which are suitable for all eye shapes. Visit **rellonbeauty.com** IG: **@rellonbeauty**

17. DIPPED IN HUNNEE inspires you to create unique looks using their vegan and cruelty-free eyeshadow palettes. Be bold or subtle, perfect for everyday use. Highly pigmented with a long-lasting, and easy to blend formula. Their mission is to make beauty stand out on all skin tones. Visit: **dippedinhunnee.co.uk** IG: **@dippedinhunnee**

18. KISSED EARTH harness ingredients from nature, sourced from some of the most abundant places in the world. Their luxurious Awaken Collagen Day Cream is formulated to help smooth the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles, whilst aiming to protect the skin against the effects felt from pollution. Contains collagen peptides, essential oils and nutrient rich botanical extracts. Visit **kissedearth.com.au** IG: **@kissedearth**

19. HAIR & GRACES is a luxury haircare brand designed to help hair feel strengthened and thickened. The formula is based on pumpkin and hydrolysed silk, naturally sourced in Japan. Products are designed to improve the look and feel of your hair. Visit **hairandgraces.com** IG: **@hairandgracesofficial**









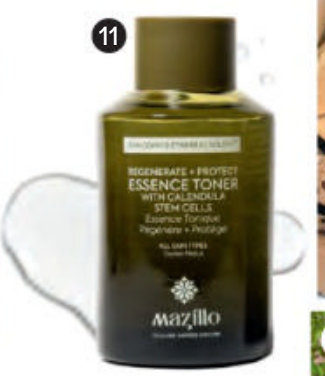












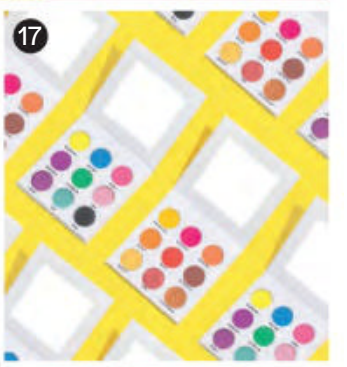




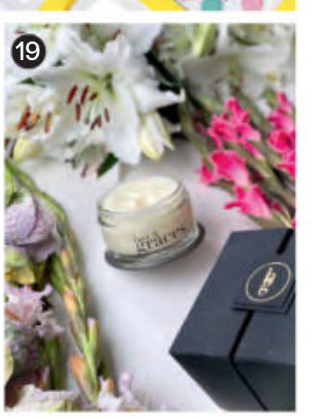












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Sparkling Gems





































1. AMORCITO is an ever-evolving jewellery brand on a mission to create fun and playful designs while retaining a high-quality standard to help your pieces last a lifetime. San Diego-based designer, Vanessa Murnane, gains inspiration from beauty that exists throughout the landscapes of the Californian coast. For the bold, colourful, and outspoken. Visit **amorcito.us** IG: **@amorcito_jewelry**

2. ADAE JEWELRY strives to be the ultimate shop for hypo-allergenic, tarnish resistant, high-quality, everyday jewellery. They believe jewellery is diverse and inclusive; just like people. With 18-carat PVD gold plating, unique stones, and freshwater pearls, they only introduce pieces they are proud to put their name on. Visit **adaejewelry.com** IG: **@adaejewelry**

3. Every bracelet by **CANDY BEADS** is handmade to order. Made with Healing Crystals or 14K Gold Filled Beads, these bracelets are strung on flexible elastic and personalised to bring individual meaning to the wearer – a modern take on nostalgia for friendship bracelets. Visit: **candybeads.co.uk** IG: **@candy_beads1**

4. ILAYA JEWELRY offers beautiful, extravagant, and statement jewellery. Designed in Miami and handmade in India by artisans, each piece is made using natural semi-precious stones, baroque pearls, and 22K gold plated brass. Ilaya is all about enhancing your true natural beauty by shining through with one of their feminine contemporary pieces. Visit: **Ilayashop.com** IG: **@ilayajewelry**

5. Las Vegas-based brand **EARTH SAGE JEWELRY** was created to honour spirituality. They have three stunning collections: Talisman, Secret Garden, and Earth Stone, each created using the lost wax casting method. Featured are their earrings which are part of the Earth Stone collection. Visit **earthsagejewelry.com** IG: **@earthsagejewelry**

6. FIEL JEWELS merges timeless statement pieces with the gospel of God. Their tarnish-resistant vermeil jewellery is meant for the show stopper and fashion-forward. This beautiful collection is not only made to enhance your wardrobe but also to transform your life. Visit **shopfiel.co** IG: **@fieljewels**

7. ADARAYA JEWELLERY designs bring different materials together in perfect harmony with high-quality materials. Inspired by women, every piece aims to find perfect interceptions between craftsmanship, materials, countries and people. Visit **adaraya-jewellery.com** IG: **@adaraya_jewellery**

8. HINE FINE JEWELRY is an NYC-based jewellery designer who creates custom jewellery and engagement rings. She specialises in antique diamonds. Hine is known for her #bringmegrandmasjewels campaign, where she repurposes stones from older jewellery and creates exquisite modern designs. Visit **hinefinejewelry.com** IG: **@hine.nyc**

9. FULLORD Enkai Ring in 18 karat rose gold and diamonds. It is inspired by the traditional MASAI spear, a childhood memory of Founder and Creative Director Sandrine Thibaud who was born and raised in Africa. Visit **fullord.com** IG: **@fullord_geneva**

10. Australian brand **CVLCHA** designs unique, eye-catching, and elegant pieces which are contemporary, yet timeless. They are distinctive everyday statement pieces that embody the beauty of culture and empower confidence in expression. Each design is lovingly and flawlessly crafted by global artisans. Visit: **cvlcha.com** IG: **@cvlcha**

11. ALJA is a young artist who creates bubbly jewellery in Slovenia. She loves to combine gold and crystals, amazed by nature's beauty. Featured are the stackable Bubble Dances rings with Diamonds, Tourmalines, and Moissanites. Visit her bubbly world **aljakumpjewellery.com** IG: **@aljakumpjewellery**

12. GEMELLA JEWELS. As third-generation jewellers, Anna and Rachel were always surrounded by their family's extravagant one-of-a-kind pieces, which have naturally become their greatest source of inspiration. The Dancing Queen bracelet is 18k gold with pink sapphire 23.1ctw. The bracelet measures 7.5″ and is also available in other precious stones, yellow gold and black gold. Visit **gemella-jewels.myshopify.com** IG: **@gemellajewels**

13. ASH HERRERA redefines exquisite jewellery to help you make a statement. The combination of classic pearls and bold pendants creates the perfect glamorous look. Featured is their gorgeous hand-wrapped silver wire with freshwater pearls, anchoring a clear faceted quartz tear drop stone. Visit **ashherrerajewelry.com** IG: **@ashherrerajewelry**

14. DELILAH COLLECTIVE is a Canadian brand that creates handcrafted, delicate jewellery statements. Inspired by simple beauty and joy, Delilah uses ethically sourced freshwater pearls, glass beads, sterling silver, 18ct gold-filled findings and clay to create one-of-a-kind pieces. Visit **delilahcollective.com** IG: **@delilahcollective**

15. STUDIO MUI is a small-batch jewellery and decor brand that celebrates femininity and individuality. Each piece is thoughtfully designed, pigmented and carefully handcrafted by Emily Liu in New York. Like comfort food, she hopes to spark joy and nostalgia through her food-inspired jewellery. Visit: **studiomui.us** IG: **@studio.mui**

16. LA DAJE encourages women to feel sexy, confident and rebellious. Featured is their Cavo Paperclip Charm Bracelet in 18k gold vermeil with their new Palmanova Gold and White Enamel Pendant. All their pieces are handcrafted in Italy. Visit **ladaje.com** IG: **@la.daje**

17. Inspired by the art of fragrance, **JOSÉPHINE DE STAËL** revives Parisian Art Nouveau fine jewellery techniques to reveal the polysensory wonders of the floral world. Joséphine has created a collection for Floris London. Each jewel is hand-sculpted in wax, cast in silver, gold and rose gold or enamelled by Joséphine and features Japanese hand-woven silver and gold thread. Visit **josephinedestael.com** IG: **@josephinedestaeljewellery**

18. NOSTALGII JEWELRY is a fine jewellery brand focused on creating elegant, minimalist 14k solid gold and natural diamond jewellery for the modern woman. Their feminine pieces are perfect for everyday wear and can also be dressed up for an evening out, whether worn alone or layered. Visit: **nostalgiijewelry.com** IG: **@nostalgiijewelry**

Just For You

1. LOLA & FLUFF is a curated collection of luxury goods for the modern pet. They offer beautiful, modern, and high-quality designs for the posh pawdience that want to match their parent's contemporary aesthetic. From vegan leads to artisan-made apparel, 5% of all sales are donated to animal rescues. Visit: **lolaandfluff.com** IG: **@lolaandfluff**

2. VORN creates timeless wardrobe staples for a discerning buyer. Specialising in knitwear, this Colombian brand appreciates comfort whilst providing a sophisticated edge to their clothing. That's why their collection is made with natural fabrics. Visit **vorndesign.com** and follow **@vorndesign** on IG.

3. SPLASH PLACE SWIM GOGGLES is women owned and made in the USA. Their goggles are patent pending meaning hair is no longer susceptible to being pulled or tangled. They offer a wide selection of fun prints and solids for kids and adults. Worldwide shipping available. Visit **splashswimplace.com** IG: **@splashswimgoggles**

4. FORT are a brand new men's skincare brand, based in the UK. All of their products are 100% natural, certified vegan and cruelty-free. This is the new generation of high-performance skincare for men, without the guilt. Visit **fort-men.co.uk** IG: **@fortmenscare**

5. GLOWSAINT launched in 2022 with the aim of providing sustainable, vegan-friendly and cruelty-free luxury products. All their candles are made in the UK using coconut wax and eco-friendly methods. They offer worldwide shipping, use code VANITYFAIR for 15% off your order (expires 31/07/22). Visit **glowsaintlondon.com** IG: **@glowsaint**

6. AURUM CANDLES & SCENTS create a variety of heavenly scented candles from biodegradable, plant-based waxes that are free from paraffins. Eco and vegan friendly. Timeless and classic with a minimalistic design. Small batched, artisanal candles that are lovingly hand poured in Melbourne. Visit **aurumcandlesscents.com** IG: **@aurum.lightfromwithin**

7. Clarified butter (Ghee) by **GAI GHEE BUTTER** is a one-ingredient, organic recipe. Ghee is a 4000-year-old naturally derived ingredient that can be used as cooking oil and butter. Made in small batches with pasture-raised cow's milk local to the brand's manufacturing facility in Chicago for maximum freshness. Contains naturally occurring fatty acids and the product has a high-smoke point. Shelf-stable. Visit **gaigheebutter.com** IG: **@gaigheebutter**

8. PIPER & CLOTH pride themselves on crafting artisan children's clothing using organic and sustainable fabrics. With an effortlessly classic style and heirloom quality, they use natural synthetic-free fibres to create well-loved pieces that last forever. Use code 'VANITYFAIR15' for 15% off their entire collection (expires 15/06/2022). Visit: **piperandcloth.com** IG: **@piperandcloth**

9. BLUE CYPRESS CERAMICS creates hand-built and wheel-thrown porcelain vessels that serve as both utilitarian and heirloom. Potter Jane McGee draws inspiration from the nature she was immersed in as a child, growing up on the East Coast of the United States. Visit **bluecypressceramics.com** and follow **@blue.cypress.ceramics** on IG.

10. FISCH INC is a bespoke design company helmed by Ash Fischer and located in Marrickville, Sydney. With a design focus on interior lighting and recycled homewares, Fisch Inc strives to explore the beauty in the mundane. Ash's products sit at the intersection of environmental consciousness and functional design, drawing on aesthetic tropes from the 60s and 70s. Visit **fisch.com.au** IG: **@fischinc**

11. From Canada to the World, **MILLION YEARS CANDLES** creates handcrafted coconut and soy wax candles with pure fragrance oils. Their exotic fragrances blend with your inner space and spark your aromatic sensation. Mio Gelato is tailored to lift your mood all summer long. Visit: **millionyearscandles.com** IG: **@millionyearscandles**

12. Handcrafted in Vancouver Island, Canada, **WIND + WILLOW CO** creatively produces contemporary yet unconventional concrete decor. The perfect fusion of sophisticated design and clean aesthetic, offering a modern touch to any space. From rich earthy tones to luxurious gold accent pieces, this brand is a decor essential. Visit: **windwillowco.ca** IG: **@windwillowco**

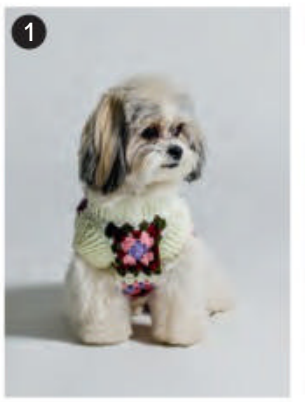
13. HIGHER STATES ceramics are designed by artist, Chloe Park. Each piece is inspired to bring in elements of nature and organic beauty with an avant-garde edge to amplify the essence of freedom. All truly unique pieces and handmade in the spirit of quiet luxury. Visit **higherstates.live** for direct enquiries, follow on IG **@higherstatess** or email **info@higherstates.live**

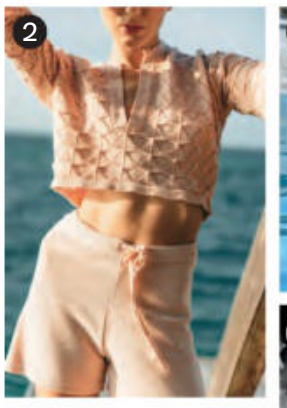
14. ELEGANTLY BOXED offer a unique range of carefully curated gift boxes. Their focus is supporting Black owned and small British businesses to offer customers a beautifully presented gift for a friend, colleague or loved one. Visit: **elegantlyboxed.co.uk** IG: **@elegantlyboxed**

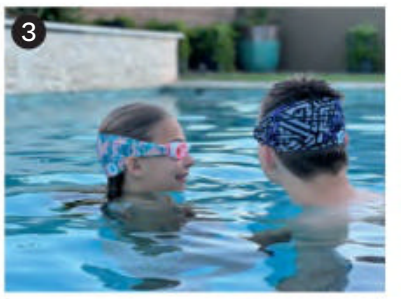
15. A personal masseuse to target your cramps. **NOMISK**'s Maia is a warm, relaxing massage that hits all the right spots. The combination of heat and massage therapy helps to soothe the feeling of cramps and reduce the appearance of bloating. For more information visit **nomisk.com** or follow on IG **@nomisklife**

16. GAIA HOMEWARE, a mother and daughter venture based in Kent will help you create a luxurious and stylish space with their beautiful eco-friendly furniture and homeware. All designed and produced to protect the planet and bring a touch of nature into your home. Alex, co-founder, creator and furniture maker offers a bespoke service for her handcrafted furniture and wooden wares. Appointments can be made through the website or Instagram. Visit **gaia-homeware.com** IG: **@gaiahomewareuk**

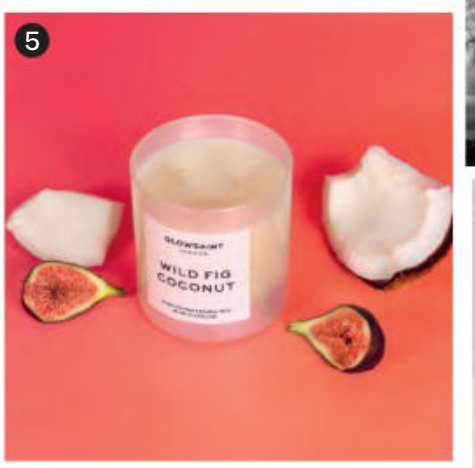
17. LOVE LANE LONDON offers prêt-à-porter evening wear and bridal accessories for eco-conscious fashionistas. Mix and match elegant dresses with trendy capes and exquisite hair accessories, including their Swarovski Pearl String which can be worn as a headband, necklace, or bracelet. Items are sustainably made with love in London. Visit **lovelanelondon.com** IG: **@lovelanebridal**





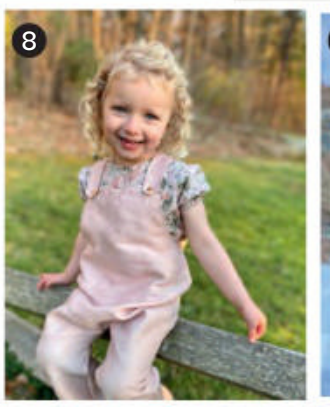
















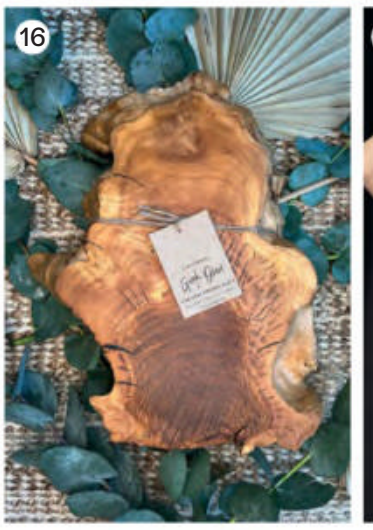


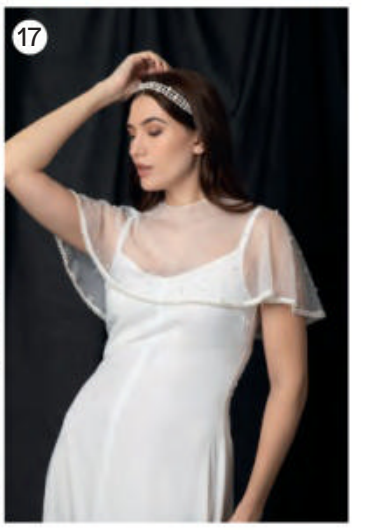








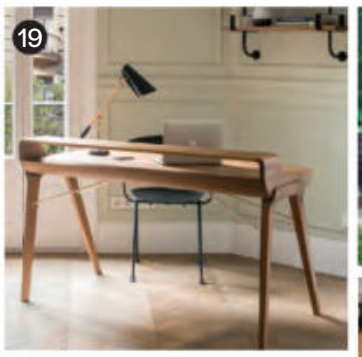


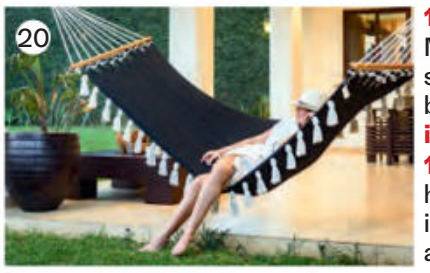


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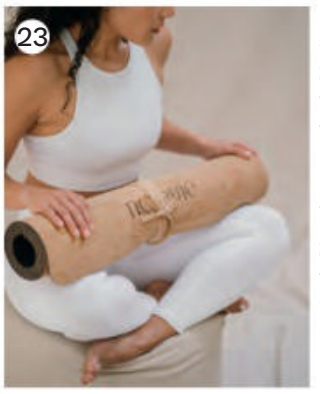






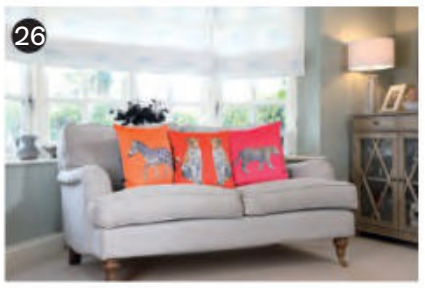












18. IQUAR, founded by Paris-born and London-based designer Matilda de Lageneste, creates a range of hand-sewn silk scarves. Manufactured in the UK, the colourful designs aim to bring a versatile addition to everyday styling. Visit **iquarparis.com** IG: **@iquar__**

19. ARTISAN specialises in the manual production of high-quality furniture made from solid wood, and this insistence on manual handcrafted work is what sets Artisan apart. Through their collections, as well as individual pieces, Artisan offers a wide range of furniture such as seating, tables, sideboards, beds and lamps. Visit **artisan.ba** IG: **@artisanlovewood**

20. ARTISSANOS pieces are designed by Mari Tefel and crafted by the hands of Nicaraguan artisans. Their impeccable craftsmanship and tradition come together to create one-of-a-kind pieces. Their handmade goods will be subtle reminders of wonderful moments spent at home and a sense of goodness given to the artisan communities. Visit **artissanos.com** IG: **@artissanos**

21. LOOK DOLLICIOUS is a nineties inspired, accessories haven for the eccentric twentysomethings. Everything is handmade with love, with the highest quality materials. Shop their eclectic range of luxurious handmade gold Tarot decks, scented candles, snazzy keychains, bags and more. Visit: **mylookdollicious.com** IG: **@lookdollicious**

22. EMBODYED TEA aims to help women restore hormone imbalances. Premium loose leaf herbal teas made with 100% Australian certified organic ingredients such as ginger and nettle leaf. Use code VF10 for 10% off your first order (expires 31/07/22). Visit **embodyedtea.com** IG: **@embodyed_tea**

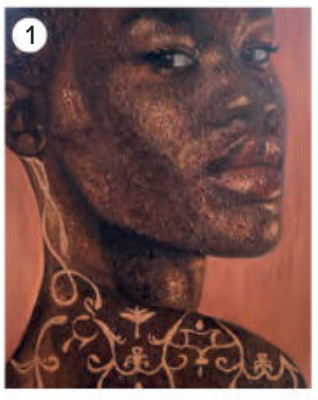
23. NOVEME offers premium exercise equipment that connects with nature and is sustainable. Their Natural Yoga Mat is made with a 100% natural cork top layer, is non-slippery and features a unique design, making it a functional yet aesthetic exercise piece. Visit: **noveme.co.uk** IG: **@noveme_uk**

24. Inspired by clean, genuine living, **CULTURE OF GOOD** offers handmade, sustainable scented candles. They use wooden wicks for added texture and sound, alongside curated scents that create moments of nostalgia that transcend you back to your favourite memory. Visit **shopcultureofgood.com** Email: **hello@shopcultureofgood.com** IG: **@shop_cultureofgood**

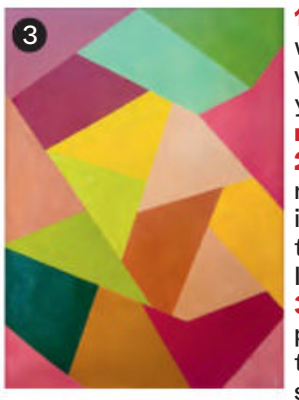
25. BOBBIE WATCHES is a London-based, independent watch brand. The company's first collection is named after three inspirational women and the founders are committed to empowering every woman to be bold and live life colourfully. Bobbie has donated 10% of their first collection to Smart Works. Visit **bobbiewatches.com** IG: **@bobbie_watches**

26. TRACEY COOPER designs contemporary homeware and gifts. Her work is vibrant, joyful, and invites colour and originality into the home. In celebrating British manufacturing, she ensures the highest-quality fabrics and craftsmanship are incorporated in her products. Visit: **traceycooper.co.uk** IG: **@tracey.cooper.artist**

A Work Of Art



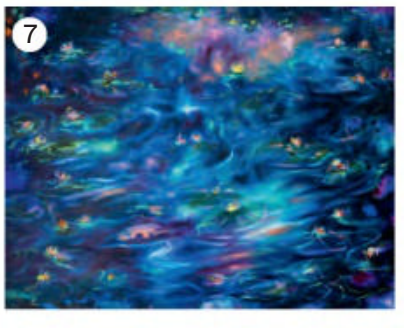


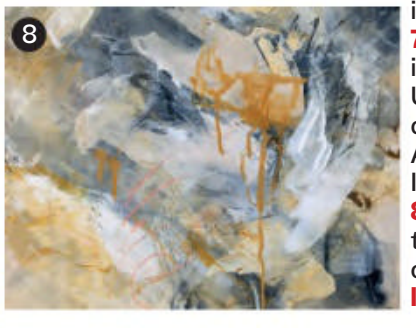












1. MARINA CHISTY is a Russian-American artist who currently lives and works in NYC. Her abstract and figurative paintings seek to capture the viewer's gaze, searching for direct contact with them. A gaze that investigates you and at the same time unveils something about itself. Visit **marinachisty.com** IG: **@marinachisty**

2. MOISÉS MORENO is a London based Spanish artist whose paintings are a reflection of our lives. His vibrant abstract work starts with chaos and turns it into order, whilst preserving some of the remains of the initial chaos, integrated transitionally in the calmest areas of the painting. Visit **moisesmoreno.net** IG: **@moisesmorenomoreno**

3. PONTOPPIDAN ART is an original and unique interpretation, told with oil painted on canvas by Caroline Pontoppidan Vest. Memories and understanding tell stories, and expressions in the surroundings drive her passion. "We all search for a balance while life keeps giving us new fragments". Visit **pontoppidanart.com** IG: **@pontoppidanart**

4. HESHO SERRAY is a Sweden-based abstract artist with great appreciation for earths' beauty in all its form and texture in which it is expressed. A feeling she creatively aims to capture in her artwork to design patterns evoking different memories and emotions in the eye of the beholder. Featured is her piece titled Amore. Visit: **heshoserray.com** IG: **@heshoserray**

5. EDITH is a worldwide exhibited abstract artist. After travelling the world and learning of different cultures, she realised the importance of exploring within. Abstract painting became her outlet to express her internal feelings and share thoughts that cannot be put into words. Visit **edithart.hu** IG: **@edithart.hu**

6. PEDRO SOUSA LOURO explores the use of geometry and architectural forms within his mixed-media compositions. Each artwork is a result of Pedro's visual perceptions, as he creates pieces that evoke a dialogue between colour and geometry. His work has been featured in global publications and coveted internationally. Visit **pedrosousalouro.co.uk** IG: **@psl.artstudio**

7. In this series titled 'Color Garden', artist **CASSANDRA GLANZMANN** explores the impermanence of life, emphasising the constant flux of nature and its inevitable passing. Using gestural brushstrokes, Cassandra creates ephemeral abstractions that seem to disappear before your eyes. For more information about Cassandra and her work contact Allison Thompson of AT Art and Interiors **allisonthompsonstudio.com** IG: **@atartinteriors**

8. Mixed media artist **LYNSEY SALVONA** explores natural surfaces, capturing the texture and colours formed in these often forgotten places. Her very moving paintings combine layers of paint with drawing to create striking artwork for interiors. Visit **lynseysalvona.com** IG: **@lynseysalvonaart**

9. ALLISON HUOT is an abstract expressionist painter from Thunder Bay, Canada. She is famous for her large scale colourful abstracts centered around music and synesthesia. Commissions available. Visit: **allisonhuot.com** IG: **@allisonhuot**

10. Brooklyn-based artist **LILY SWAB** talentedly creates artwork that is propelled by her emotions. Each piece reflects an inner dialogue which mirrors Lily's thoughts during her creation. Her 'Pointe' piece is amongst many of her figurative pieces, with other collections implementing mixed media, water colours and digital aspects. Visit: **lilyswabart.com** IG: **@lilyswabart**

11. KASIA MUZYKA is a Polish-American artist creating intuitive, abstract artwork. She aims to take the viewer beyond the ordinary in an individual transformative experience. While creating this painting in response to the war, Kasia connected with the energy of the moment and channelled a message to the world – one that would inspire others to support The Beating Heart of Ukraine. Visit **kasiamuzyka.com** IG: **@kasiamuzyka**

12. British artist **EMMA HOLLINGWORTH** paints in her unique abstract style creating deeply meaningful, purposed art. 'You do not have to be fearless to be brave' is full of colour, detail and depth, and reminds you to remain positive, courageous and confident. Visit **emmahollingworthart.com** IG: **@emmahollingworthart**

13. SUJATHA KRISTENSEN is a Sweden and Dubai based artist. This painting is a reflection of the artist's inner state of dealing with the deep and unsettling wounds of trauma, combined with an external need for flow, balance, and structure. Visit **creationsbysujatha.com** IG: **@sujathakristensen_art**

14. RAY DAK LAM is a designer and illustrator from Edmonton, Alberta. His work is characterised by bright colours, playful geometric shapes, and bold shading techniques. He's worked for big players within the tech, design and creative industries. Visit: **raydaklam.com** IG: **@raydaklam**

15. SARA HODGSON BROWN is an award winning Canadian landscape painter, using rich colour and expressive mark making to convey ever-changing light. Sara's work strives to capture the impermanence of the moment and the ineffable sense of freedom found there. Visit **sarahodgsonart.com** IG: **@sarahodgsonart**

16. ERNEST COMPTA LLINÀS is a Catalan Artist based in Barcelona. He is best known for his facial portraits and is stylistically influenced by abstraction and expressionism. The emotional state and mood of his subjects are captured through nuances in looks and gestures. Visit **ernestcompta.com** IG: **@ernestcompta**

17. SIMONI is a Greek artist in the zeitgeist of the contemporary art scene, exhibiting around the world. Her art is described as a parthenogenesis in human emotions. The main themes are eros, dreams, paradise and youth. Visit: **simoni.studio** IG: **@simoni_studio**

18. JENNIFER GLANCE is drawn to the landscape, as it is in constant flux, but remains resilient with time, much like the human spirit. Ethereal clouds and the dance of light on water are captured in her oil paintings. Her artwork is available at NYC-based allartworks.net and galleries in the U.S. Pictured is "What Separates Us". Explore her stunning collection at **jenniferglance.com** or follow her on IG **@jenniferglanceart**

19. Internationally recognised artist **LINDA HARRIS REYNOLDS** has been creating memorable portraits for families and individuals for the past thirty-two years. Linda's vibrant painting style serves to enhance the personality of her subjects, and reflects a blending of Classical Realism and Impressionism. Visit: **lindaharrisreynolds.com** IG: **@lindaharrisreynolds**

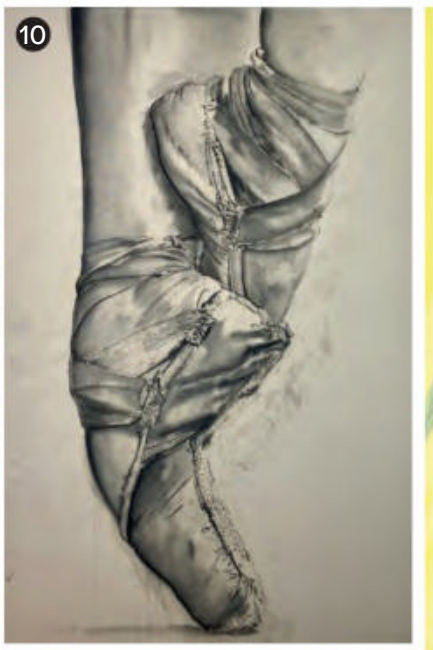
20. MATT KING is an American/British London-based artist. He is a recent MA Fine Art Painting graduate from UAL Camberwell College of Arts, and was selected for the prestigious London Grads Now. 21 show at the Saatchi Gallery. Matt considers himself an expressionist, blending figuration with abstraction, painting directly from the subconscious. Visit **mattkingartwork.com** IG: **@mattking_artist**

21. STEVEN MILLER is an abstract artist based in New York, whose work surrounds the interplay of colour and form. He explores how concepts that appear simple are more complex in reality. He has displayed his vibrant paintings worldwide. Visit **stevenwmiller.com** IG: **@smillernyc**

22. British-Brighton-based abstract artist **ZOË NEILSON** explores the use of movement and colour to convey ideas of surreal dream-like states and alternative realities. Capturing unique hypnotic moments in time of paint rippling, creating a preternatural image that can only be caught in a split second. These are being sold as original wall art. Visit **zoeneilson.com** IG: **@zoe.neilson.art**

23. BARBRO P. BISMO. Inspired by the contrasting light and colours in the raw nature of Northern Norway. She often paints intuitively by inner images, mood, and feelings. She explores the chaos of life expressed through intense and captivating play with colours. Visit **barbrobismoart.no** IG: **@barbrobismoart**



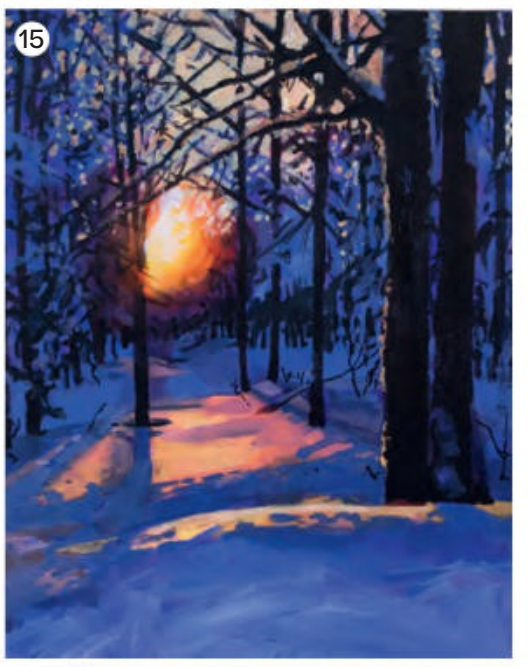


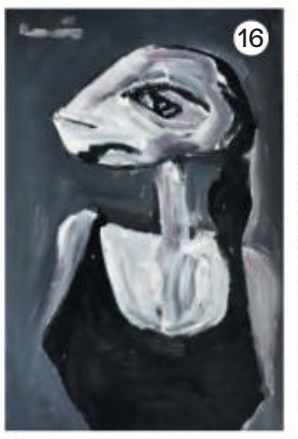


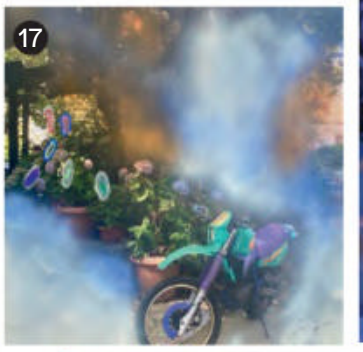








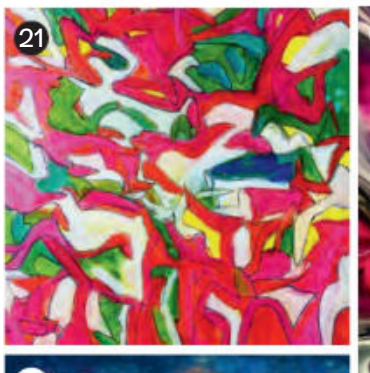


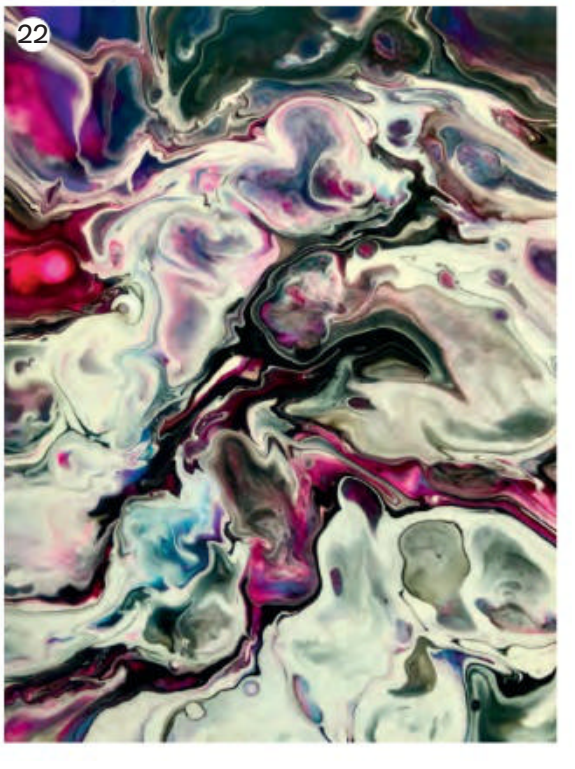


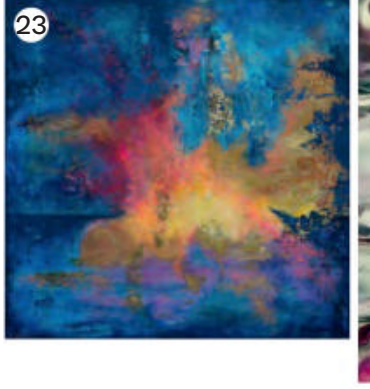












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LILY TOMLIN

The writer and comedian on mantras, weltschmerz, and the sublime joy of making Queen Elizabeth smile



What is your most marked characteristic? People tell me it's my smile. When my face is in repose, I can look quite serious or sad. **What is your idea of perfect happiness?** Filling out this Proust Questionnaire. I try to be in the moment. **What is your greatest fear?** Being onstage and forgetting why I'm there. **Which living person do you most admire?** My partner, who's helping me with this Proust Questionnaire. **With which historical figure do you most identify?** Eleanor Roosevelt, Harriet Tubman, Sappho. **What is the trait you most deplore in yourself?** Impatience.

What is the trait you most deplore in others? Cruelty. **What is your greatest extravagance?** Amazon.com. **What is your favorite journey?** I adore Greece. My second favorite is London, where I did a show. Queen Elizabeth attended, and I remember her turning to her companion, Lord Mountbatten, and smiling at something I said. **What talent would you most like to have?** To be a fabulous singer. **What is your greatest regret?** Regrets, I've had a few, but then again, too few to mention. **What or who is the greatest love of your life?** My partner, Jane Wagner. **What is your current state of mind?** Mindfulness is what I seek, but weltschmerz is my current state. **If you could change one thing about your family, what would it be?** I wish more of them were alive, especially my mom and dad. **What do you consider your greatest achievement?** I feel I still have to achieve it; however, time's running out. **If you were to die and come back as a person or thing, what do you think it would be?** A goddess like Venus de Milo but with both arms. **If you could choose what to come back as, what would it be?** A doctor without borders. Or maybe Ava Gardner. **What do you regard as the lowest depth of misery?** Did I mention weltschmerz? **What is your favorite occupation?** Working on a good part or a good production. **Who are your favorite writers?** Eudora Welty, Toni Morrison. There are so many writers who have touched me. My partner, Jane Wagner. Virginia Woolf, Lillian Hellman. **What do you most value in your friends?** That they're my friends. I trust them and they trust me. **How would you like to die?** In my sleep, "dreaming android dreams of electric sheep." **What is your motto?** I have a transcendental mantra that I am supposed to keep to myself. **Where would you like to live?** Outside the box—always. ■

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